

DR. EVELYN COLBERT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: This is tape one side one with Dr. Evelyn Colbert. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Evelyn?

COLBERT: Yes.

Q: When and where were you born and could you tell me something about your family?

COLBERT: I was born in New York City on July 6, 1918. My grandparents and their families were part of the massive flight of Jews from Russia during the pogroms of the 1880s. At the time of their arrival in New York, my father was a baby, my mother a toddler. I was a late child and did not know any of my grandparents.

My father ran his own business, an export-import company dealing largely with Latin America. His involvement with Latin America had come about during the Spanish-American war when he was a very young man. An outspoken pacifist, he was fired from his job in the chemistry library at Columbia, his boss being a strong supporter of the war. Through a friend, who had married into a prominent family in Mexico City, he got a job in a mining company and quickly became fluent in Spanish. After a number of years in Mexico, he moved to a mining company in Honduras. Returning to New York, he organized the export department of one of the major chemical companies of the time and then went into business on his own. Because of my father's business connections, my family entertained many Latin American visitors but, called upon to do no more than pass the peanuts, this did not particularly enlarge my horizons.

My mother before her marriage had been what was then called a typewriter at a company that published the leading women's magazines of that time. My recollection is that she enjoyed her job. But she never worked thereafter.



I have one sibling, a brother six years older. For a long time I was the brat kid sister. But by the time I was twelve or so, we became good friends. It was he who introduced me to the joys of browsing through the second-hand bookstores that then lined Fourth Avenue, where all sorts of treasures could be found for fifteen cents and a quarter. We have remained very good friends even though, since college days we have never lived in the same place.

Q: New York was quite open wasn't it in those days? A small child could move around quite freely?

COLBERT: Absolutely. Those were the glory days for growing up in New York. As soon as you could be counted on not to get lost, which in New York was an easy stage to reach, you had the freedom of the city. Where I lived, Riverside Park, Central Park, and the major museums were all within easy reach and the museums were all free.

Q: Politics, of course in New York City in that era, were quite strong weren't they?

COLBERT: They certainly were in my family. My father had become an active Socialist at an early age and remained one. When I was growing up he was on the board of directors of the Socialist weekly newspaper, The New Leader, and of the Socialist-affiliated Ranel School. So international and national politics were routinely part of family discussions and the subject of a number of the periodicals that came into the house. The Nation, the American Mercury, and, of course, The New York Times. Debates, sometimes rather heated, among family and friends concerned not only general domestic and international issues but also questions of particular interest in left-wing circles: the rights and wrongs of Soviet policies, support for non-Socialist, reformist leaders, relations with the Communists. One the last issue, my father was very much of the right-wing. When the Socialist Party split in the late thirties because its then leader, Norman Thomas, wanted to enter a united front with the Communists, my father was part of the group that left the Socialist Party and set up the Social Democratic Federation.

As far as politics were concerned, my mother walked very much in my father's footsteps. Pacifism was the one belief that she held very strongly. Otherwise her real interests lay in art, the theatre, and music. However, she was a great admirer of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and was very happy to be able to vote for him when the Socialist Party supported him for a second term.

Q: How did your parents' views rub off on you?



COLBERT: I was very much influenced by both my parents. They were both very strong-minded and articulate. My mother, in particular, had lots of time for me and, before I did such things by myself or with friends, she took me to plays, concerts, and galleries. My father not only stimulated my interest in politics and international affairs but also encouraged an interest in science which, however, did not outlast my high school years.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

COLBERT: Reading was something you did naturally, like breathing.

Q: What about early on, what kinds of books?

COLBERT: All kinds. Whatever was in the house was open for me to read and that was a lot. And if I wanted to read the popular serials, that was okay too. We had a very good local public library; beginning in eighth grade I think it was, you had access to the adult section. By the time I was twelve or so, I was reading adult books, classic and contemporary, but still reading children's books as well. My favorite authors at that time were Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, E. Nesbit, and A.A. Milne.

Q: Where did you go to school, let's start from your first schooling?

COLBERT: My first school was a coeducational grade school. I went from there in fifth grade to the all girls Joan of Arc Junior High School. It was very good with the basics, but very conservative. Most of the teachers were all, in my eyes, very elderly. Basics aside, I think I learned more from my parents, from reading, and from outside activities, particularly Girl Scouts, than I did in junior high school.

Q: How Jewish was your school? Both schools?

COLBERT: My junior high school drew entirely from the neighborhood which was part of the upper west side which was then very diverse but in a geographically divided way. The apartment houses of Riverside Drive, West End Avenue, and Central Park West were largely occupied by upper middle class business and professional Jewish families, quite conservative socially and politically. Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues and the side streets were mostly lower middle class and working class, predominantly Irish and Italian. We all went to school together but Jewish girls predominated in the fast-track classes.



My high school, Lydia Wadleigh, was very different. Located on the fringes of Harlem, it drew students of very varied backgrounds from all over the city. About one-third of the students were black but I don't remember much real contact between black and white students. Unlike my junior high school, Wadleigh did not rank very high academically, but I found it much more stimulating. The teachers were younger, more liberal, and imaginative in their approach. Some of them were even married and not all of them were women.

Q: What sort of activities did you get involved in in high school?

COLBERT: I was on the school newspaper and our combined yearbook literary magazine. Typically of the times, our senior yearbook was dedicated to peace. Most of my activities took place outside school but in company with schoolmates. My circle was very literary. We read a good deal of poetry, gave one another Edna St. Vincent Millay's latest books as presents, fancied ourselves as bohemians, and spent Saturdays in Greenwich Village.

Q: Where did you go during the summer?

COLBERT: In my very early childhood we summered at the Jersey shore. For a number of years I attended a Girl Scout camp on a lake in the Hudson River valley. It was very cheap and run on a shoestring on tennis courts, horses, or other expensive facilities. The emphasis was on taking advantage of the natural surroundings hiking, woodcraft, nature study, water sports, canoeing, folk-singing, and folk-dancing. I loved it but at fifteen I felt I had outgrown it. Thereafter, I spent my summers as a camp counselor in arts and crafts and/or dramatics in a number of different camps.

Q: At high school, were they pushing the students towards college?

COLBERT: My high school at least was very unlike those of today in this regard. We had no guidance counselors or the equivalent. In my particular circle of friends we all assumed we were going to college and where we applied was a personal or family matter. Of course, in that era, there was nothing like the tension over being admitted that there has been for so many years. You didn't have to apply to six schools to be sure of being admitted to one. Perhaps it was the depression. Or perhaps there were many fewer high school students going on to college.

Q: At the high school, were they pushing the students towards college?



COBLERT: I had always had Barnard in mind. I really didn't want to leave New York. It was the place I did everything I was interested in. Nor did I have any particular desire to live away from home since I did not feel at all restricted in my activities and, from what I'd heard of it, dormitory life did not appeal to me. Plus, a practical consideration, I had a four-year New York State scholarship that could only be used at a college located in the state.

Q: How about the depression? How did this affect things?

COLBERT: Our depression began well before 1929. My father, having been quite wealthy, had managed to lose a good deal of money some years before the crash. So that the big difference was that, among the people we knew, everybody else became as poor as we were. But this was not the poverty of breadlines, unemployment, and other real depression era suffering. Instead, for us, being poor meant living in a smaller apartment without a river view, having no maid, not buying or doing expensive things in short, living very frugally. But living frugally was not all that bad. Lots of things were free like the museum or very cheap, like movie and second balcony theater tickets and neighborhood restaurants, and you could lead quite a good life without much money.

Q: Then the New Deal came along. What was the impact of that on your family?

COLBERT: Not much that I can recall on our economic circumstances, but considerable impact otherwise. When Roosevelt ran the first time, the Socialist position that there was no real difference between the two major parties remained unchanged. But, with the New Deal under way, the Socialists supported him for a second term, in line one might say with the principles of Fabianism that were a strong influence on my father. Domestically, it was a hopeful period in many ways not only the programs to correct social and economic ills but also the ferment in the arts and literature. But there was a dark side as well. The world outside was becoming increasingly disturbing and concern with the threat of war and fascism was very much part of the intellectual climate of the thirties.

Q: So you went to Barnard? You were there from when to when?

COLBERT: 1934-38.

Q: What was it like when you were there?



COLBERT: I have to start out by saying that Virginia C. Gildersleeve was the dean of Barnard in my day. Although she has gone down in history as a liberal, to us she seemed very conservative both politically and socially and the school reflected this. It was a much smaller school than it is now. I think we were about 900 altogether. Academically, it was rigorous if you wanted it to be, but it was also possible to get by without undue exertion if you chose the right major. Socially it was great because, although it wasn't coeducational, we had all those boys across the street at Columbia College and there were twice as many of them as there were of us. I lived at home so I was not subject to all of the dormitory rules.

Q: In by 10 and all of that?

COLBERT: In by 10 and having to sign out where you were goina walk being the favorite destination.

Q: I know 10 years later, I used to date girls at Smith and all, they all went to the library. Did you have to wear gloves and a hat on certain occasions?

COLBERT: It wasn't a matter of regulation, one simple did. The activism on the campus of the thirties, unlike that of the sixties, was not a life style rebellion. Our casual dress for classes and on campus by today's standards was very conservative, sweaters and skirts, or suits. There was only one dress rule; no slacks or ski pants unless it was snowing and you commuted from the suburbs.

Q: Where the young ladies at Barnard from when you were there?

COLBERT: The greatest number were from the New York area, Manhattan, the outer boroughs, the near and distant suburbs in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. There were quite a few from the South and others from elsewhere in the country. There were a few foreign students but not very many.

Q: Were you concentrated in any area?



COLBERT: I was a history major and, as such, took history all four years. But the history faculty, with the exception of the medieval history professor, was not terribly stimulating. The government and economics departments were much livelier. The titular head of the government department, Raymond Moley, was on leave in Washington helping run the New Deal and the real mainstay of the department was the quite young Thomas P. Peardon who had just made assistant professor and who was an outstanding teacher and a very stimulating one. These days, he probably wouldn't get tenure. He didn't do research or publish and was always available for conversation with students. I took almost all of the government courses available and two or three in economics.

Q: Did the events both in the Far East and in Europe concern you? This is the high time of Hitler and weak government in France, and you had Mussolini and then you had the Manchurian takeover. Things were really happening.

COLBERT: All that was very much part of our atmosphere. Events in Europe were of particular concern. It was, after all, the part of the world we were most familiar with. Those of us concerned with such matters were anti-Japanese, pro-Chinese and we tried to demonstrate our sympathies by wearing rayon stockings, boycotting silk because it came from Japan. Otherwise, events in Asia the activities of Mahatma Gandhi as it didn't enter into our consciousness. These were the days of a very active peace movement on campuses all over the country in which even apolitical students participated at least to the extent of attending rallies and demonstrations. And everyone took the Oxford Pledge. You remember the Oxford Pledge.

Q: "We will not fight for king or country." It originated at Oxford University. Most of the men ended fighting very well for king and country, but during the thirties they all signed the pledge.

COLBERT: Yes. Of course, that was true also in this country.

Q: Was the enormity of what was beginning to happen to the Jews at this time in Germany emerge? I assume that a pretty steady flow of refugees was coming out of Germany?

COLBERT: In the period we're talking about, I don't think the full enormity had yet emerged. What was happening to the Jews of Germany had not yet assumed the proportions of unprecedented horror. It seemed more like a replay, a deeply disturbing one to be sure, of the persecutions familiar in the past. I don't remember personally experiencing a vast flow of refugees. I encountered only a very few: a small girl at one of the summer camps where I worked; a distinguished professor of international law at the graduate school for whom I worked as a student assistant; and a woman professional of some kind whom I helped with her English. A refugee student was among my friends at the graduate school but he was Czech, not Jewish.



Q: Extracurricular, what sort of things were you involved in?

COLBERT: A great variety of things, well beyond the peace movement and the clubs focused on politics and international relations. I was on the literary magazine, becoming editor in chief in my senior year, and also on the editorial board of our other two publications, our yearbook and newspaper. The latter was particularly rewarding; I did movie reviews in my junior year and play reviews as a senior. In those days, at least, the theatres which were far from filled, found it worthwhile to provide free tickets in exchange for reviews in the Barnard Bulletin. I was in something called Greek Gamea competition between the freshman and sophomore classes in dance, various athletic events, and poetry. I directed the Junior Show, another long-lived institution. We had a very active literary society devoted to filling a gap resulting from the fact that, until my senior year, English literature teaching stopped before the modernists. We were quite successful in getting contemporary poets to come for talks and readings. William Carlos Williams among them. An added attraction was provided by our joint meetings with the Columbia College literary society.

Q: And boys, did you have time for boys?

COLBERT: Oh yes, indeed. In this regard, we were better off I think than many other girls' schools. Being part of a university that included Columbia College and being in a big city meant that our social life wasn't so focused on weekends and formal dances although we had plenty of those. And those of us who lived at home could entertain there; in this regard, I benefited from living near the campus and having very hospitable parents.

However, although our social life was coeducational, our academic life was anything but. In my four years, I was in three coeducational classes. Two were in my freshman year. One was a course in ancient history offered to both Barnard and Columbia students because it was given by one of the foremost experts in the field who was teaching at Columbia for just one academic year. The other was a course in analytic geometry. I was assigned to this course rather than freshman math because I had had four years of math in high school. The class included two other Barnard freshmen, a couple of Columbia College students, and a couple of graduate students. We all found it a miserable experience, our teacher a German baroness and a very advanced mathematician indeed seemed quite unable to understand that all of us - graduates and undergraduates found her lectures extraordinarily difficult to follow. In my senior year, my grade point average permitted me to take one course in the graduate school. This was a course in political theory with Robert MacIver, a distinguished political scientist and a great teacher.

Q: You moved from Barnard to graduate school at Columbia?



COLBERT: Yes. I had been supposed to go to Oxford and had been admitted to Somerville College. But this was 1938 and both my father and my faculty advisers argued that Oxford would not be a good investment since war was likely to break out within a year and I would be sent home lacking the degree for which a two-year stay would be required. So in the fall of 1938 I entered what was then the Public Law Department (later Political Science) with a major in international relations and a minor in political theory.

Q: You went all the way through at Columbia to get your Ph.D. this was from 1938 to when?

COLBERT: I completed my MA in June 1939 and in the next year completed my course requirements for the Ph.D. and passed my doctors orals. (This was not unusually fast in those days.) My next step involved selecting and justifying a dissertation topic, a rather crucial task at that time since Columbia still had a publishing requirement and, at least in theory, one's dissertation was supposed to add something significant to the existing state of knowledge. In the fall of 1940, not yet having a topic and therefore unable to apply for a fellowship, I took a job as a teacher-in-training at a New York City high school where I was a dogsbody for the chairman of the history department and taught two classes one in modern European and one in American history. This gave me plenty of time to spend in the library where, having selected a dissertation topic, I concentrated on working up a prospectus that would support a fellowship application. With a fellowship in hand, I returned to Columbia full-time for the 1941-42 academic year working on my dissertation. The Doctrine of Retaliation in International Law under the supervision of Professor Philip C. Jessup. However, in the summer of 1942, newly married, I moved to Washington and the next year went to work for the Office of Strategic Services so I did not complete my dissertation and get my degree until 1947. My dissertation was finally published in 1948.

Q: You were at the graduate school at Columbia for four years. Was it sort of a continuation of your four years at Barnard or very different?

COLBERT: Very different. My academic life was now very coeducational but in an unbalanced way since in the Public Law Department women were a very small minority. There was only one way in which we suffered any discrimination and this was in connection with something called the Wilsonian Club. Membership was by invitation to the best students, but only to men. Since it was an honor to be invited and the club met at professors' homes, I suppose we should have resented the exclusion. But I don't think any of us did. Our consciousness had not been sufficiently raised. I should add parenthetically that of my five classmates who, like me, ended up in the State Department, three were women Kathleen Dougall and Elizabeth Brown from the Public Law Department and Alberta Colclaser from the Law School.



My life in the graduate school was also significantly changed in other ways. In college my activities and interests had been scattered over a wide area. At the graduate school, they were much more focused on my major and minor subjects and extracurricular activities consumed very little of my time. They were pretty much confined to the Public Law Club, which included only students of our very small department and was largely social, and to bull sessions over beer after long hours at the library. I should add, I suppose, that I didn't spend all my time on Morningside Heights. There were still the attractions of the city and a social circle beyond my fellow students.

The change in focus of our bull sessions was another marked difference, a difference resulting from the changes in the world around us that culminated in the outbreak of war in Europe. The issue was no longer simply peace or war; it had become more complicated. Was military force the only feasible response to Hitler's advance? Could one be against fascism and also against war? The Oxford Pledge had already become irrelevant in Britain. Was it an appropriate position for Americans? And, most of all, what should the United States do? Pearl Harbor, of course, settled the debate between interventionists and isolationists. In due course, most of my classmates went into government service, military or civilian. I can remember only one conscientious objector in my circle; eventually he opted out of his CD camp and joined the army.

Q: By the time of Pearl Harbor had you had more exposure to developments in Asia?

COLBERT: My graduate work had involved somewhat more exposure to developments in Asia and, of course, China was very much in the news. I took at least one course with Professor Nathaniel Pfeffer, who before he came to Columbia had been for many years a journalist in China and whose lectures focused on Japanese foreign policy. And, in his seminar on Post-War Imperialism, of which I was a member for two years, there was also some discussion of Asia. But Asia still remained on the fringes of my consciousness.

Q: I'd like to go just one step back. Could you tell me a little bit about your husband. His background and how did you meet him?

COLBERT: I met him at Columbia where he had arrived in 1939 as a graduate fellow. He was born and brought up in Victoria, British Columbia. After he graduated from the University of British Columbia, he worked for a year or two for the provincial government in Vancouver. Since he was in the Public Law Department as a major in international law and relations we were in a number of classes together and got to know one another fairly quickly. In due course, we became a couple and were married in May 1942. Not long after that he was offered a job with the British Raw Materials Mission and we moved to Washington.



Q: You said you went to work in OSS. How did that come about?

COLBERT: For a year or so after we moved to Washington, I continued to work on my dissertation at the Library of Congress feeling free to fend off a couple of job offers that came my way during this period. (Women with some training were a hot commodity in those days.) But I was becoming aware that sending Jessup chapters about private reprisals and retaliation during the Napoleonic Wars was putting an unfair burden on a very conscientious man who was heavily involved in the war effort. So I decided that the time had come to get a job. No sooner had I made that decision when I got a call from Jessup inviting me to come to work for him in the State Department in an office doing postwar planning. No sooner had I filled out the State Department forms when I got a call from someone named Burton Fahs who said, "Professor Pepper recommended you. I wonder if you would be interested in working on Japan in the Office of Strategic Services. It then turned out that State Department hiring had been frozen and Jessup encouraged me to let OSS go ahead and clear me arguing that in the time that process would take either State would open up again or, if not, I'd have an interesting job in OSS. So, I went to see Fahs, confessed my total ignorance of Japan, was interviewed by a number of people, a couple of whom I never saw again, and was offered a job.

I was told the clearance process would take three months which proved exactly correct. I spent the time reading everything available on Japan at the Carnegie Endowment library. To someone accustomed to doing research on the US and Europe, it was pretty slim pickings. The books I remember as most useful were a study of contemporary Japanese government and politics by Robert Reischauer (Edwin's brother killed in 1937 in a Japanese air attack on Shanghai) and a history of Japan's emergence as a modern state by the Canadian scholar, E. Herbert Norman. Also useful were some books and articles by journalists covering recent events. Two had memorable titles: Government by Assassination and Japan's Feet of Clay. So, when I reported to work at OSS on December 13, 1945 I was at least better informed. And, although I didn't know it, I was on the road to becoming an Asia specialist at a time when Asia specialists were few and opportunities correspondingly great. Had I been hired to suit my qualifications in the European division, I would have been a gofer for a host of very eminent scholarsome of them the top men in their fields. In the Far East division, I was given interesting and challenging work from the start.

Q: Wasn't the OSS a predecessor of both CIA and the State Department's INR?

COLBERT: Yes, after the war. When I joined the Research and Analysis Branch (the predecessor of INR), OSS was only about six months old. Earlier, it had been part of an organization called the Coordinator of Information (COI) established in July 1941 and, a year later, divided into OSS and the Office of War Information. OSS came under the jurisdiction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, itself newly created.



Q: How did it feel to be working in an intelligence organization at a time when this was something really new?

COLBERT: When I joined there was still a pioneering atmosphere. This, together with the unaccustomed secrecy in which we were supposed to be operating was quite exhilarating. Research analysts in Washington were not involved in the deeds of derring-do overseas for which OSS became famous. But we did hear about some of them from the R&A units stationed overseas. And, as secret servants, we wore badges which we were supposed to conceal when we left the building. Likewise, when we were asked, we were supposed to say only that we worked for the US government. So that was very exciting. At the same time, it was not wholly unlike the university most of us had only recently left behind. In terms of age and experience we fell into three categories: students, junior faculty, and senior faculty (fewer of the latter in the Far East division than in others.) And those of us who had recently been graduate students, instead of paying fees, were now being paid for doing much the same kind work we had been doing at university.

Q: Where was your office located?

COLBERT: In an old eight-story apartment building on the corner of 23 and E Street NW. It was known as War Annex I. It was crowded and uncomfortable. No air-conditioning, of course, but if you were on the top floor, as we were most of the time, it was hotter still because the roof was not well-insulated. In the winter, because the windows did not fit well, it could be very cold indeed, despite out efforts at weather-stripping. We did have an escape, a new, air-conditioned annex of the Library of Congress where R&A had a large reading room. It was very popular in the summer time.

Q: How did your office fit into the overall organization?

COLBERT: The Research and Analysis Branch, with some administrative and functional exceptions, was organized regionally. The Far East Division had three subdivisionpolitical, economic, and geographic. The Japan section was one of three sections in the political subdivision, the others being China and Southern Areas which included both India and Southeast Asia. Some members of the staff were genuine country specialists but many were, like myself, quite new to Asia, others had Asia connections that came from residence as missionary, military, or foreign service children.



Our chiefs were all very young, mid or late thirties. Charles Burton Fahs, the Division Chief, was one of a very small group of young American academics who had specialized in Japanese language and history before the war. Cora DuBois, chief of the Political Subdivision, an anthropologist, had done her doctoral dissertation on the people of a small island in the Indonesian archipelago. When she was assigned overseas she was replaced by C. Martin Wilber, a Columbia University China specialist. Edward A. Kracke, chief of the Japan section had only recently been transferred from work on China. He was a Sung dynasty specialist. In December 1943, I became the second of two analysts working under Ed Kracke. The other, Jane Alden, like me, had no real Asian background. But she was more knowledgeable, having taken a couple of courses in modern Japanese politics and government. She was also a relative old-timer having started out in COI. For the first few months of my tenure, however, she was on leave in New York waiting for her navy husband's ship to be commissioned. In the following years our professional staff grew somewhat in size although not significantly in expertise. Our staff also came to include several Nisei enlisted men who worked at our Library of Congress annex. They were intended to provide us with a translation capability but they were uneducated and unable to handle written material of any complexity.

Our numbers were also intermittently augmented by a variety of consultants. Two of these were former missionaries and I do not remember that they made any specific contributions to our work. Two others were political scientists with more relevant expertise. One of these, Kenneth Colegrove of Northwestern University, was not a Japan specialist but, in collaboration with a Japanese American assistant, whose name I have forgotten, had produced a number of very useful journal articles on Japanese government. The other, Chitoshi Yanaga of Yale, came to us late in the war and was an invaluable guide. We were also able to draw on the expertise of one of Margaret Mead's husbands, I forget which. He would drop in from time to time and tell us about the impact of toilet training on Japanese behavior.

Q: Were you involved with Joseph Grew at all or was he too exalted?

COLBERT: Much too exalted. The two young men who had served one after another as his private secretary in Tokyo before Pearl Harbor were Marshall Green and Robert Feare were both in Washington. Marshall in the Navy and Bob in the State Department. But I have no contact with either of them or with anyone working on Japan in the State Department until after the war. Of the two academic Japan specialists then in Washington Hugh Borton in State and Ed Reischauer in the arm I knew only the latter. This was essentially a social relationship resulting from a Reischauer-Kracke friendship dating from Harvard days and from my friendship with Bob Reischauer's widow, Jean, an OSS colleague.



Also in Washington at the time were a number of missionary families who had been repatriated from Japan after Pearl Harbor. I was assigned to interview them but, although I found them interesting to talk to and I'm sure they contributed to my understanding of Japan and the Japanese, the problems of government structure and functioning that were so much part of my work were not ones on which they could be of very much help.

Q: When you arrived at your job, were you given any preliminary training or indoctrination?

COLBERT: None on Japan. Some on OSS which I remember as not very illuminating and sometimes rather baffling. For example, whenever I was summoned for a briefing, I was almost always also shown a short film on the bombing of Wewak. It was only years later that I discovered that Wewak was in New Guinea and I never did find out why I was shown the film or what I was supposed to learn from it.

Q: You have said you were concerned with Japanese government structure. Was this the major part of your work?

COLBERT: In its various aspects it certainly constituted a large part of it. I had come on the job just as a program under the army's Civil Affairs Division had gotten under way. In anticipation of the post-war occupation of Germany, Italy, and Japan, it was intended to provide information on all aspects of administration for which the occupying forces might become responsible. The job of producing these civil affairs handbooks was assigned to various agencies according to their competence. I wrote the ones on national government, local government, and the police and judicial systems; sections dealing with the economy were prepared in our economic subdivision. The handbooks were to be followed by guidehow-to advice depending, in Japan's case, on three different assumptions: surrender before an attack on the home islands; surrender after invasion and brief hostilities; surrender after prolonged hostilities. I had been embarked upon one of these having to do with local government when the war ended, relieving me of a task I was sensible enough to realize was far beyond my experience and capabilities.



Another military sponsored program in which we were involved was the Joint Army Navy Intelligence Survey, the JANIS. These studies were intended for the use of forces invading enemy-occupied territories and were largely concerned with such subjects as coasts and landing beaches. But they also had brief sections on political and social characteristics. The two areas involved for which the Japan section was responsible were Formosa and Korea for which we had no corresponding expertise. I remember heavy reliance on the Encyclopedia Britannica and, for Korea, lengthy conversations over the phone with George McClure, a Korea-born specialist, who had left OSS for State, and his wife Evelyn, also Korea-born. For Formosa, we relied on a classmate of Ed Kracke's at the Pentagon, who had spent time there before the war and on a prewar series of dispatches from John Emmerson, a Japanese language officer, presumably there in a consular capacity.

I was also able to participate in the other major part of our worth effort to keep up with and report on what was going on in Japan in contributions to our division Situation Report, a weekly produced by each of R&A's regional divisions. We were also from time to time called upon to provide briefings mostly for the military. I remember one in particular on Japanese air-raid precautions. It was memorable only because when the colonel I briefed later thanked my boss for sending me, having forgotten my name, he referred to me as "that cute little girl with glasses". Times have changed!

Q: Did you get much useful information from reports from the field?

COLBERT: If there was any clandestine reporting from Japan on political subjects, I never knew of it. We did get classified summaries, rather like our Situation Reports, produced by the British in India but, as I remember them, their Japan-related material dealt with the occupied territories, not with Japan itself. I remember only one example of American reporting from the field that was useful in our work on Japan. This was a series of reports from John Emmerson who, rather late in the war, joined the Dixie Mission in Yenai the U.S. team assigned to Chinese Communist headquarters. Until John arrived, Dixie Mission reporting had focused on China and local activities. As a Japanese speaker, John was able to take advantage of the presence in Yenai of one Sanzo Nosaka, a major prewar Japanese Communist Party leader, interviewing him at length on Communist plans and objectives for post-war Japan, where, for a time, the party was to be an important political force. For me, these reports were particularly valuable because we had recently initiated a study of pre-war Japanese political parties in anticipation of their post-war revival. With her academic background in prewar Japanese politics, Jane Alden was assigned the two parties that had dominated Japan's parliamentary period; the Socialists and Communists, of very little importance in this period, fell to me.



Translation of various kinds also came to us from the fielmmostly soldiers' diaries and POW interrogations. These were interesting for what they revealed of Japanese attitudes and behavior, but they did not contribute to our work. We did make some use of an annual official directory the Shokuin Roku that listed all the elements of the government structure down to the lowest level, helping us track the changes as the war progressed and make some guesses about their significance. The edition held by government agencies in Washington was quite out of date. When it was discovered that the Navy had concealed its acquisition of a more recent one, it was quite a scandal.

Q: What were your major sources of information?

COLBERT: For the most part, we were dependent on unclassified sources, sources that have only now been dignified with an unlovely acronym of their own, OSINT, open source intelligence. Most important for purposes of current analysis was the Daily Report produced by the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS), an invaluable source then and thereafter. Providing daily translations of government and other Japanese broadcasts, it was a principal tool in our efforts to track political and related developments in Japan and to gain some sense of the changing atmosphere as the war progressed.

More dated but still useful were the Library of Congress files of prewar Japanese English-language periodicals; the Japan Times in particular. I was also able to find in the Library of Congress some specialized studies in English of Japanese legal and administrative institutionone particularly useful one for Civil Affairs handbook purposes was a study of Japanese law by a German scholar whose name I have forgotten. Another was an account of the government of Tokyo by the eminent American historian, Charles A. Beard, who had been commissioned by the Japanese government to analyze proposals for its reorganization.

In connection with the Civil Affairs program, it is ironical that while I was struggling with these limited sources on subjects of which, even in the American context, I had no real experience, R&A had in its ranks someone who would be able to do a really expert job. This was Thomas L. Blakemore, an American law school graduate, who, before the war, had taken a law degree at Tokyo Imperial University and had become proficient in the Japanese language. He, however, was in China in the OSS unit doing target work for the 14th Air Force. Although at the time, I chafed at the obstacles to enlisting his help in any serious way, I have to admit in retrospect that what he was doing in China was of much more consequence than what he might have done in the Civil Affairs program had he been in Washington.

Q: Was your work on Japan bringing any changes in your attitudes toward the Japanese?



COLBERT: I don't really think so. I came to my job with what were pretty much the standard attitudes developed during earlier Japanese aggression in China. Japan was a military dictatorship supported by an economic oligarchy, sustained by an elaborate mythology revolving around the Emperor system, and reinforced by severe police controls; and behaving with the utmost brutality to the people who came under its rule. I did not, however, share in those stereotypes that painted the Japanese as either less than human or especially mysterious in their behavior or as incapable of more enlightened or democratic government. Nor did anyone with whom I was associated.

Q: At time went on, did you begin to see changes taking place in Japan in reaction to the fact that the war was going against them?

COLBERT: We did look at changes in the government and Japanese propaganda for clues as to how the government was responding, how it was coping. But I don't think we developed any significant insights. Our confidence that we were now winning the war, that the end might be coming nearer really came from the actions on our side, not from anything we read into Japanese behavior. We were certainly aware that in Washington the terms of Japanese surrender and in postwar treatment were being discussed more intensively at higher policy levels, for example in the State War Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) which was established at the end of 1944.

Q: Did your office have any role in the SWNCC discussions?

COLBERT: Not any that affected activities at my level. It is possible that Hugh Borton, who did have a role, may have engaged Burton Fahs, in such discussions. The answer might be found in Borton's memoir which I have not read. But Borton did gather some of us together for after-hours discussions of peace terms at Jean Reischauer's conveniently located apartment. What I recall from these discussions is the focus on the fate of the Emperor. This, of course, was being rather widely debated at the time, some arguing that he should be treated as a war criminal and the emperor system abolished, others that he was not a principal decision-maker and that his retention would be important in promoting peaceful acceptance of post-surrender allied occupation. Most of us supported the latter course.

Q: Did you have any inklings of the atomic bomb?



COLBERT: None whatever. But I do remember a question that was put to us toward the end of the war that, in retrospect, it seems to me might have been connected to the discussion of its use. We were not told who made the request or why. We were merely told to respond briefly and quickly to the question of how the Japanese would respond to an invasion. Would they surrender quickly or would there be a prolonged and bitter resistance? My recollection is that we opted for the latter.

Q: Was this before or after we invaded Okinawa?

COLBERT: I don't remember but it seems likely that it was at least during or after Iwo Jima.

Q: We move on now to a new period. The war is over. The wartime agencies are being terminated. What is happening to your part of OSS?

COLBERT: In the months between Japan's surrender and October 1945, our future seemed very uncertain. For some of us this was of no great consequence academics returning to their universities, young women whose husbands were returning from overseas, resuming their prewar lives. But some of us were prepared to remain if this should prove possible. I was one. My husband had already moved to the Washington headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) so it was clear that we would be remaining in Washington. At this time, I had no real commitment to a future in Asian affairs and my brush with studying Japanese had convinced me that I would never have the language capability for real scholarship. On the other hand, I enjoyed my work and my colleagues so I was happy to stay on when R&A was transferred to the State Department in October. The other part of OSS became the nucleus of the Central Intelligence Agency.

It took some time for our place within the Department to become fixed. Initially, under the influence of senior Department officers who had opposed the transfer, R&A was broken up and its regional divisions attached to their respective policy offices. In January 1947 this decision was reversed and R&A was reunited first as the R area under a Special Assistant for Research and Intelligence and then as the Office of Intelligence Research (OIR). At some point thereafter, OIR became INR, its present title. My office became the Division of Research for Far East (DRF) subdivided into three branches: China, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia. The latter consisted of a Korea section and, on Japan, a political section where I worked and two economic sections, one covering industry and trade, the other labor, finance, and agriculture.

Q: How was your job affected by the transition?



COLBERT: In this respect, we in DRF, especially those of us working on Japan, were very fortunate. We were really not affected by the hostility many old-line FSOs felt toward the inclusion of a large number of OSS outsiders. At that time, the senior staff of what was then known as FE was far from exclusively foreign service. This was especially the case with respect to Japan which, in fact, had become at least the partial responsibility of the Office for Occupied Areas under Major General John H. Hilldring as Assistant Secretary. The principal officers on the political side in its Japan-Korea secretariat were Ed Reischauer and Hugh Borton, both academics and old friends of Burton Fahs; the economic side was run by Edwin M. Martin who had joined the civil service in the mid-thirties and, in 1944, had come to our OSS office as chief of the economic subdivision.

Of our principal counterparts at the working level, Alice Dunning (later Hsieh) and Robert Fearey were both civil servants at that time. Marshall Green, who was to join them after a first foreign service assignment in New Zealand, was only too happy to cooperate with anyone prepared to cooperate with him.

Perhaps even more important, we were able to be of particular service to the policy desk because of circumstances arising from the organization of the occupation of Japan under General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). MacArthur was indeed supreme, operating under general directives that had originated in Washington but acknowledging no responsibility either to Washington or our allies in implementing them. The latter were represented in Washington by the Far Eastern Commission which, although officially a policy-making body in fact played no such role. The Commission's members, the ambassadors of the eleven member countries, were nevertheless intent on asserting their right to be informed. If only for diplomatic reasons, it was important to comply with their demands for information and, to do so, was State's responsibility. But our equivalent of an embassy in Tokyo was the Office of the Political Adviser, merely a SCAP section with no reporting authority.

In this regard, we in DRF were able to fill the gap thanks to a SCAP provided service, the work of its Allied Translation and Interrogation Section (ATIS). Everyday we received from ATIS a legal size volume of translations of Japanese newspapers and other publications. SCAP censorship was devoted largely to preventing any criticism of the U.S. and the Occupation or support for militarism and the old regime. Otherwise the press was free to report on developments in Japan and did so in detail. Exploiting this large mass of data, we were able to follow on a timely basis Occupation activities, the new ferment of the social and political scene, and the continuing problems of the Japanese economy. For the Japan desk, our ability to put this material together and provide it in written or oral form freed its officers from the demands on their time and attention that mining for themselves this vast flow of data would have entailed.

Q: Could you talk a little more about the content of the work of your office during this period?



COLBERT: Since, for some time, our FE counterparts were still in old State, we were on the phone more than we might have been otherwise. This was particularly the case with what might be called our number crunching responsibilities: keeping track of the purge, the removal from office of those regarded as responsible for Japanese aggression, and of the number of members of the armed forces repatriated from overseas.

Analytical papers, however, remained at the center of our work. Some of these were prepared in response to requests, mostly from FE. Some were in response to immediate needs with very short deadlines. One of these that I particularly remember was stimulated by the publication in the New York Times early in the occupation of the full text of the SCAP drafted constitution that was to replace the Meiji constitution. This development, wholly unanticipated in Washington, preceded by not very much time a scheduled meeting of the Far East Commission. It could be anticipated that the members, irate at this disregard of their prerogatives, would have many questions about the draft. Since I had already prepared a rather detailed study of the Meiji constitution and had been reporting on Japanese revision proposals, I was able to respond to FE's request for a detailed analysis of the SCAP draft within the close deadline imposed by the imminent FEC meeting.

Other studies were less constrained by short deadlines. Among these was a series, originally requested by Hugh Borton, that analyzed progress toward democratization in various fields: education, the press, the police system, public administration, and so forth. The pace of change as restrictions on political activity were lifted also made us almost weekly contributors to the Situation Report (of which I became division editor right after the war). Writing for the Situation Report enabled us to be up to the minute since the papers published there did not go through the sometimes slow process of OIR review.

While the Situation Report by its nature encouraged brevity, even there and even more in our other written output, we continued to reflect our academic origins. We tended to write at length; our papers were footnoted; and, although summaries were provided, format was not a consideration.

Q: How did you feel about the changes that were being imposed on Japan?



COLBERT: I don't remember that any of us had any quarrel with the basic policy and objectives. Where we were critical was with the way these policies were being implemented; the way in which SCAP officials, with no previous exposure to Japan, seemed to be transferring their experience as federal or state government officials to the programs they were now implementing. On specifics, I saw the decentralization of the police system as a futile exercise, unlikely to survive the end of the occupation as indeed it did not. I was also dubious about the emphasis on protecting the civil service from political influence along American lines since my own studies, limited as they were, had convinced me that, far from needing protection, the Japanese bureaucracy needed to have its power curbed. I was concerned also that in an independent Japan there might be a strong reaction against some of the provisions of a constitution imposed from without, notably those concerning the Emperor and the renunciation of war. Although the debate in the Diet's upper house during the ratification process lent some support to this view, the passage of time has proved me wrong. It is only now, more than half a century later, that the revision of Article IX has become a real possibility while today's big issue concerning the Emperor relates to female succession.

Q: Did your analyses provoke any reaction from SCAP? Was there any point at which you were criticized or told to stop?

COLBERT: No. The first point is that we were not in the business of criticizing policy or policy-making. To the extent that our misgivings entered into our product at all, they would have been reflected only very indirectly in our discussions of Japanese reactions. Secondly, I'm not sure that anyone in SCAP's higher levels was even aware of our existence.

Q: Were you able to get to Japan during the occupation period?

COLBERT: In the early post-war days, the only way to get to Japan was to sign up with the occupation for a full term - I think it was two years. Later, I don't remember when, it became possible for DRF analysts to spend a month or so in Japan in connection with some particular project. At least two analysts in the Japan political section were able to take advantage of this opportunity, but I was already the mother of a small child and accordingly in no position to do so.

Q: Coming to the later yearby 1948, the Cold War was really underwawhat with the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin blockade. Did this bring about any change in your work?



COLBERT: Cold War compulsions certainly brought about a change in U.S. policy toward Japan. This was the year of the so-called "changed course" when U.S. emphasis on Japan's democratization was replaced by emphasis on its economic recovery, hitherto defined as outside American responsibility. Earlier policies aimed at purging "ultranationalists and militarists" and dissolving the economic monopolies were softened. The trade union movement, which had become increasingly Communist-influenced, militant, and strike-prone, became the target of laws curbing its activities. New restrictions were imposed on the Communist Party, a major beneficiary of occupation-endowed political liberties, which had become significantly more radical in the wake of Cominform criticisms of its earlier "lovable party tactics". New efforts to conclude a peace treaty were also encouraged by expectations that an independent Japan would become an American ally.

DRF's role remained unchanged: analyzing events as they occurred, examining new trends, and, in general, responding to the requirements of our mostly State Department customers as they expressed them or as we anticipated them. To be sure, we had views about policy that entered into our conversations if not our papers. I remember, for example, discussing with Marshall Green the pros and cons of what seemed a likely SCAP decision to ban the Communist Party. I don't remember whether he put our thoughts on paper.

Q: You mentioned the peace treaty. Was your office involved in that?

COLBERT: Sometime in 1947, steps toward convening a peace conference were abandoned, it having become evident that U.S.-Soviet agreement over its composition and treaty provisions was impossible. Nevertheless, a committee chaired by Hugh Borton continued to discuss peace treaty provisions. My then branch chief and I were both members and our office prepared a number of papers dealing with peace treaty issues. I do not recall that this committee survived Borton's return to Columbia in 1948 and the appointment of John Foster Dulles assigned to negotiate a treaty through bilateral agreements with each of the countries involved. My office played only one small part in that process, memorable only to me. At some time when I was in the last stages of pregnancy and on leave, Dulles asked for a briefing on the Japanese Communist Party and I was called in to provide it. Feeling I had done a reasonably good job, I was somewhat taken aback when, showing no indication of recognizing that I was enormously pregnant and good wishes might be in order, Dulles offered no more than the most perfunctory thanks.

Q: Did you have any relationship with George Kennan and the Planning Staff?



COLBERT: With Kennan only once when, just before he left the Department, he called together all of us who were working on one aspect or another of the Communist movement. Presumably he felt it important to convey some parting thoughts. But, if so, I don't remember what they were. Our relations with Planning Staff members concerned with East Asia were quite close and active. In one joint paper that I particularly remember we tried to predict the situation in Asia ten years hence. Exactly ten years later, Joseph Yager, then on the Planning Staff, was given a similar task. I suggested that he take a look at our earlier paper to see whether we had been right about anything and where we went wrong. But the paper was nowhere to be found.

Q: Were you asked during this period to take a long-term look at where Japan itself might be going?

COLBERT: Normally this would have been regarded as a regular part of our work. Our China-watcher colleagues, for example, were called upon to participate in long-range estimates, one at least looking ahead 35 years. I suppose that, as long as we were occupying Japan, it might have seemed inappropriate to speculate about the survival of SCAP reforms.

Q: During most of this period, McCarthy was riding high on the Washington scene. How did this affect the atmosphere in which you worked?

COLBERT: I suspect the depression pervading the Department was felt most acutely by those of us concerned with Asia. It was, after all, the China-watchers who were principal target John Service and John Davies among them. Some of our DRF staff were subjected to intense interrogations and there were some resignations. We were all constantly being interviewed by investigators who seemed both crude and ignorant. I remember, in that age of innocence, being very much embarrassed when I was asked whether I thought one of my colleagues was a normal male. I had the wit to reply "you should ask his wife" but I'm sure I blushed. My own distinctly minor problem resulted from the publication in 1952 by the Institute of Pacific Relations of a declassified version of my INR study of left-wing politics in Japan. Some time later with others in INR I was invited to an NSA briefing. Just before the visit I was disinvited I was told because my book had been published by a suspect organization.

Q: Was Korea part of your orbit?



COLBERT: No, it came under a separate section. I don't remember that it got very much attention before the North Korean invasion. I do remember my last conversation with George McCune before his death. He was deeply concerned about the decision at the end of the war to cut Korea in two with U.S. forces taking the Japanese surrender in the south and Soviet forces in the north. He feared that this division would become permanent with disastrous consequences for the Koreans.

Q: The Korean War, does this change anything for you?

COLBERT: Only in providing the one occasion in this period when I was at all involved in Korea. Responding to the Secretary's request for an INR estimate of reactions worldwide to possible U.S. responses, I wrote the estimate on Japan after branch-wide discussion. We concluded that Japan would be deeply disturbed by the invasion and fearful of the future and that, if we failed to respond vigorously, the Japanese would lose faith in our commitment to their defense and move toward neutralism.

That was my last involvement in issues having to do with the Korean War because, several months later, I made a decision that was to govern my career for the next ten years. I was very happy in my job. I liked and respected the people I worked for and with. I had been promoted as rapidly as civil service procedures permitted. My commitment to an East Asian focus had been strengthened and, through my role as Situation Report editor, I had become more familiar with China and Southeast Asia. But, I was expecting a second child, and, fortuitously, one of my colleagues in a similar situation had discovered that it was possible to work in the Department on a part-time basis. Equally fortuitously, there was a relatively new position of Coordinator of the DRF contribution to the National Intelligence Survey which no one in DRF of the appropriate grade wanted and which it seemed to me could be adequately handled on a part-time basis. So the deal was I'll take the NIS job but only if I can work part-time.

In the interval between this agreement and my departure on maternity leave, I found myself acting chief of the China branch for three months. A series of rather rapid personnel changes had created this vacancy and, although someone had been chosen to fill it, his transfer from the Pentagon was moving very slowly. My responsibilities involved me for the most part in making sure that things kept moving, that papers got produced, and that they were literate and sensible. But I did get involved for the first time in the estimative process. The question to be addressed was one that is still with us: will the PRC invade Taiwan? Our relatively new division chief, Sabin Chase, who had briefly headed the China branch, was a true China expert. But he was very diffident and without intelligence experience. So he asked me to come along. What we concluded I do not remember, although I daresay the answer was hedged with all the customary qualifications. What I do remember even now is that the discussion was interrupted for some time by a heated debate between the navy and air force representatives over whether it was possible to sink a junk from the air.



Q: Lets move on to September 1951 when you came back from maternity leave as DRFs NIS coordinator. Perhaps you could start by describing the program.

COLBERT: The program was well-intentioned but unrealistic. It aimed to provide the government for its guidance in peace and war with a set of encyclopedias, one for every country in the world including the most insignificant. The program was organized, funded, and supervised by CIA. Each country study contained nine chapters, each covering one or another significant activity. The chapters, in turn, were divided into sections the basic unit of production sometimes as many as ten. INR was responsible for the economic, political, and sociological chapters and for a biographic appendix. A very detailed standard outline was provided for each section to be adhered to religiously. Each INR division had an annual quota of sections to be produced. CIA's budgetary support was based on calculations about the time and manpower, professional and secretarial, required to fill the quota.

The requirement to follow a one size fits all outline was one source of analyst frustration. An even greater one was the labyrinthine three-level review process. Division review was intended to apply the coordinator's presumed expertise to substance, analytic quality, and the like; copy editing was provided by a division editor. Having survived this exercise, which frequently entailed a good deal of revision and additional work, the analyst was then subjected to two more reviews, first by INR's NIS staff and then by the CIS's NIS office. Although first priority in these reviews was ensuring fidelity to the outline and house rules governing capitalization etc., the reviewers felt free also to deal with substance, however limited their expertise. At both levels, but particularly at CIA, the reviewers, secure in not very onerous jobs no one else wanted, tended to be of rather mediocre quality and often difficult to deal with. The retired colonel who headed the CIA office epitomized the level of competence; he had graduated last in his class at West Point. The senior CIA reviewer barred any use of the word organ because of its sexual connotations. Analyst frustration with this process, a frustration I shared as the author of a number of NIS sections myself, was compounded for many by the remoteness of the program from what they saw as INR's real and much more exciting mission in support of State's policy-making responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the program had its compensations for both analysts and the office. DRF, like the rest of INR, milked the program shamelessly. Among the thirty or so analysts being paid by CIA, the best were constantly diverted from NIS work to participate in the regular program. Because of the INR-wide practice, State came remotely close to meeting its annual quota only by a major production drive in the last quarter of the fiscal year. Both the analysts and the office as a whole gained from the accrual of expertise that resulted from delving deeper into history, politics, economics, and society. Travel money was generous study trips for as long as three months could not possibly have been financed from INR's own budget.



Fro me, being able to work part-time was the major compensation. I started at about eighteen hours a week, increasing over time to about twenty fur. The experience made me a strong advocate of part-time work as a solution to the problems entailed in combining family satisfactions with professional ones. And there were professional compensations also. Ten years of reviewing, revising and writing NIS sections added immeasurably to my education, particularly on Southeast Asia.

Q: You say that the NIS analysts were frequently diverted to DRF's other work. Was this the case with you also or were your hours too limited?

COLBERT: Being part-time certainly limited the number of hours I could devote to non-NIS work. But the lulls in production did give me time to do other things. As had been the case earlier, I was called on from time to time to put together papers involving some East Asia wide issue or development. One such project gave me the welcome opportunity to spend a number of days in Paris. This stemmed from a NATO decision in the early sixties to provide its ministerial meetings with so-called Experts Papers on regions outside NATO's jurisdiction but important to its members. NATO countries were free to submit their own drafts for consideration by representatives charged with producing an agreed text at their discussions in Paris. At least in my day, the U.S. paper normally became the one around which discussions were conducted. DRF was responsible for preparing the U.S. draft, but attendance at the meeting tended to be alternated between FE and DRF. Indochina was almost always the most difficult subject on which to get agreement. When I attended the second meeting, U.S. charges that North Vietnamese troops were operating in Laos was the most contentious issue.

Q: Working on the NIS for so long, did you get any evidence, then or later, that it was being used?

COLBERT: The only use I ever heard about was by FSOs en route to countries they knew nothing about. And the only comment I can remember from a reader was from someone going to Laos who pointed out that a flag, shown flying over a building identified as a Lao government office was, in fact, the flag of Cambodia.

Q: Before leaving this period, what impact did the Wristonization program of the mid-fifties have on your work?



COLBERT: Fortunately, it was a gradual process. We did not have a sudden mass departure of civil servants opting to become FSOs or resigning. Nor did we have a mass influx of FSOs. Over time, however, the process was transforming. Since the end of the war, DRF had been predominantly staffed by long-timers, many with their roots in OSS. As the result of Wristonization, the personnel mix began to change. Many of the long-timers, including a goodly number of star performers, opted for the foreign service. Others, both competent and ambitious, expecting to become second-class citizens in a foreign services dominated organization, moved to other agencies. This was especially the case among our economists. Married women with children were least affected, facing no obstacles to remaining.

Q: You now move to another period beginning in the middle of 1961?

COLBERT: Yes. I moved to the Office of United Nations Political Affairs (UNP) in the Bureau of International Affairs (IO). This resulted from changes that affected both my job and INR as a whole. Roger Hilsman, who had come in with the Kennedy administration as Director of INR, had been instructed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk to give the NIS program back to CIA. Rusk regarded the program not only as irrelevant to the State Department but also as an obstacle to INR's proper function of policy-oriented research. Ending the NIS program meant that INR lost a very large number of positions. Many of the analysts in these positions moved with the program to CIA. Others found jobs elsewhere. But this process moved very slowly and a reduction in force loomed on the horizon. In these circumstances, I was advised to come back to work full-time since my long tenure would protect me in the event of a RIF. This seemed sensible advice. My children were now very involved with school and after school activities and I had a full-time housekeeper who loved the children who in turn loved her. But I would also be full-time in a now disappearing job and, while I could be reasonably confident that a job would be found for me, did I want to stay in INR? After all, it was the opportunity to work part-time that had kept me in INR in a rather frustrating job for so many years. And INR was now in a rather chaotic state.

Q: You're talking about 1960-61?



COLBERT: Yes, the beginning of the Kennedy administration. Hilsman, I think, was unaware that INR had been doing policy-oriented research before he came and seemed to have in mind a major reorientation without, as yet, having any coherent plans for bringing this about. And my own office was also under rather uncertain direction. All in all, the reasons for leaving seemed a good deal better than those for staying. So I began to look around and, in due course, was offered a job by Joseph Sisco who had just become Director of UNP. I knew Joe. I liked him and respected him and I knew that, under his direction, UNP would be active and influential. Joe was also willing to accept two conditions. One was that I was not to be put in charge of what we used to call Chirep, the annual effort at the General Assembly to keep Taiwan in the United Nations and China out. This was a policy with which many of us had no particular sympathy. We regarded it as having an unfortunate impact on our relations with some of our allies and as doomed to eventual failure. The other condition was that my responsibilities as far as possible would be limited to areas where I would be unlikely to have to put in a lot of overtime, especially unanticipated overtime. This was a condition for which Joe had real empathy since his wife had an executive job at Woodward and Lothrop and she too was limited in what she was prepared to do by the fact that the Sisco's had two children somewhat but not much younger than mine.

Q: Within these restrictions, what were your principal functions?



COLBERT: My principal responsibilities were for our activities and policies in two international organizations dealing with nuclear activities and issues. The more important of these, although less important than it is today, was the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The other, less known, was the United Nations Subcommittee to study the effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR). Our membership in the IAEA generated a good deal of activity, most of it fairly routine. When I came on the scene the selection of the Director General was underway and this, of course, involved seeking the support of member governments for the candidate favored by the United States. The Agency's annual meeting and the meetings every quarter of its Board of Governors generated the customary requirements for position papers many of which required consultations with colleagues in the Atomic Energy Commission and the Weather Bureau, the latter involved because the big issue of that time was not proliferation but atmospheric testing. The position paper process was enlivened by the presence in Washington of our ambassador to the IAEA, Harry Smythe. An eminent physicist, Smythe had been one of those involved in making the bomb and had written, I believe, the first unclassified history of the Manhattan Project, the Smythe Report. Although ambassadors to the IAEA were normally resident in Vienna, Smythe lived in Princeton, where he was on the university faculty, coming to Washington for consultations before going to Vienna for the IAEA meetings. Smythe was not unconscious of his own importance, but he had a good sense of humor and was clearly amused by my own role as a completely inexperienced young woman. I remember his saying on one occasion, "Ah, I know how it will be. I will get to Vienna. I will have a brilliant idea about what we should do. I will send a telegram to the Department. And the response will be that the Department considers that this is a very good idea to think about but it would be somewhat premature to raise it at this time. And who would the Department be? Why, Evelyn Colbert."

UNSCEAR normally required very little attention. Wholly non-political, its annual meetings were devoted entirely to technical issues discussed by highly-qualified scientists. However, in 1963 Canada's Minister of External Affairs had become intent on making a proposal that would have involved UNSCEAR politically, an outcome the U.S. opposed. Since until this time, UNSCEAR activities had been largely unnoticed, a good deal of explaining of its role and functions was necessary before a decision was reached on how to deal with the problem, which in the end was disposed of by the skillful diplomacy of our representative, Dr. Shields Warren, a physician of great eminence in the nuclear world.

I was also responsible for arranging the meetings of IO's advisory panel of nuclear scientists. This was largely a housekeeping matter. Taking the minutes, however, was something of a problem as I was not always sure what the experts were talking about. I do remember great preoccupation with when widespread commercial resort to nuclear power would become economically feasible. Nor do I remember, in this connection, any concern with waste disposal or, for that matter, with proliferation.

Q: Were you involved at all in Asian issues?



COLBERT: I was not involved in either of the two major Asian issues in which UNP played a part. On Chirep, Sisco largely honored his commitment. The other issue was the disposition of West Irian contested between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Disturbed by the possibility of armed encounters and hopeful that satisfying Indonesia would cause President Sukarno to become more friendly to the United States and the West, the Kennedy administration persuaded the parties to join in negotiations under the auspices of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. These negotiations were underway when I arrived and were already staffed by two Department officers, one from UNP and one from EA. So, on this issue, I was merely an interested audience for whatever reports our representative was able to provide.

When I arrived in UNP, IO's role in another high-visibility development the Geneva Conference on Laos was merely that of an interested spectator, but a spectator hoping to become involved. Accordingly, as UNP's resident Asian, I was expected to keep abreast of developments in Laos and at the conference and to provide Harlan Cleveland, IO's Assistant Secretary, with briefings from time to time. Cleveland had already made one attempt to involve the UN, and hence himself, in the conference, but his bid had been rejected by Governor Averill Harriman, leader of the U.S. delegation. I was now charged to develop a new proposal, one that would provide for UN involvement in post-conference relief and rehabilitation. Even though I had little faith that the effort would succeed, I found the exercise an interesting one, giving me an excuse to learn more about the Lao economy and its almost non-existent infrastructure. But I do not recall that the proposal I drafted with EA's help ever went anywhere. The conference ended and among the many parties involved in Laos thereafter the UN was not one.

I was also concerned with Korea as an item appearing annually on the General Assembly [GA] agenda, South Korea having been defended under UN auspices and the juridical status of the two Koreas remaining unsettled. However, the Cold War atmosphere made it inevitable that any discussion in the GA would produce no more than heated debate. It had therefore become the U.S. objective to ensure that the question of Korea would "fall off the agenda". Most of the work involved was performed by our mission in New York (USUN) in their daily contacts with other delegates. But UNP was responsible for getting out circular telegrams coordinated with EA seeking support for our tactics. It was a pretty routine job and only briefly time-consuming.

Q: You seem to have liked your job? What made you decide to go back to INR?



COLBERT: Its true, I was enjoying my job very much indeed. I was learning new procedures. I was involved in interesting new subjects and with new people. And, in some ways, it was less strenuous than working in INR: more talking, less writing; a more hectic pace, but less concentration and more variety. Nevertheless, I had two compelling reasons for leaving, one personal, the other having to do with changes in INR. On the personal side, although my children were becoming teen-agers and very busy with their own activities, it was still important to me to have a reasonably predictable schedule, to be home before the dinner hour and on weekends. And even though, if I was intermittently involved in suddenly hot subjects, it was only briefly, the way in which we functioned often, frequently unpredictable, made it impossible to count on leaving the office at the end of the regular working day. Since our "embassy", USUN, was in New York, much of our business with our counterparts there was conducted over the telephone. They in turn usually spent a good deal of the working day carrying on their business at UN headquarters, not returning to their offices until late in the day. So they were rarely available to talk business with Washington colleagues until at least 5 pm, frequently later, by which time they were likely to have more than one call to deal with.

Cleveland's working habits also often made it difficult to predict when one was going to be able to leave the office. Cleveland was not only a very ambitious man, he also found it very difficult to delegate. His deputies rarely signed off on our outgoing messages. He did. And when he was signing off toward the end of the day, he naturally turned first to the messages that he regarded as most important, as of great interest to him and on which he was going to spend perhaps quite a bit of time. Those of us responsible for less important matters would frequently face long periods in the outer office awaiting our turn. So the job, much as I enjoyed it, was really not wholly consistent with my responsibilities as a wife and mother.

At a point when I was feeling these misgivings particularly strongly, I was invited to return to my old INR office by its new chief, Allen Whiting, a China specialist from RAND. I had not met Whiting; he had been given my name by Robert Barnett, then a deputy assistant secretary in EA. But I knew of his excellent academic reputation and his ground-breaking study of China's role in the Korean War. *China Crosses the Yalu*. And those who knew him agreed that he was very energetic, very policy-oriented, very ambitious which, in my eyes, made him a good man to work for. INR as a whole looked a lot better to me. It had settled down; its basic analytical strength had survived the loss of NIS money and positions; continuing to do policy-oriented research did not, after all, require some drastic rethinking of INR's mission and structure; and its position in the Department and the Intelligence Community was bolstered by Hilsman's relations with President Kennedy who was known to read INR's papers.



The advantages seemed decisive and in September 1962 I returned to INR as chief of REA's Southeast Asia Division. I remained in INR for twelve years becoming REA's deputy director in 1968. From February 1972 until May 1973, I was on leave as a Federal Executive Fellow at the Brookings Institution. I should perhaps mention here a change in INR's status. Sometime in the fifties INR became a bureau headed by a Director. Its former divisions became offices and their branches divisions. DRF became RFE and then REA as the term Far East went out of use Department-wide.

Allen had offered me a choice Northeast Asia or Southeast Asia. Simply in terms of my experience, it seemed an even choice. I had developed an earlier specialization in Japan. But I now had acquired quite a bit of background on Southeast Asia through my work on the Situation Report and even more on the NIS. From the point of view of an intelligence analyst, however, the advantage seemed to lie with Southeast Asia. Japan was under very stable conservative control. The alliance was in good shape. The country was doing well economically. Southeast Asia was the opposite. Practically every country in the region faced a Communist or ethnic insurgency or both. Governments were unstable, coups or coup attempts common. And we were already well on the road to very deep involvement in Indochina.

Q: You were in INR for twelve years an unusually long tour in State Department terms. You must have seen a lot of changes.

COLBERT: A great many. During this period, INR had four directors, all of them from outside State. Roger Hilsman left in March 1963 and was succeeded by Thomas Hughes, his former deputy who had come to INR in 1961 from the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In 1968, when the administration changed, Hughes was replaced by Ray Cline and he in turn by William Hyland, both from CIA. In the same period, we had four office directors. Allen Whiting was followed by another academic, Fred Greene, a political scientist from Williams College who, until then, had served the office as a consultant continuing to do so after he returned to Williams. Four foreign service officers followed: John Holdridge, William Gleysteen, and Paul Popple, all China oriented, and William Hamilton, primarily Southeast Asia. I became deputy director in 1968, replacing John Holdridge in that job.



It is hard to say at this distance in time how much difference these changes made beyond requiring the usual adjustments to new people with differing backgrounds, temperaments, and working habits. At the Bureau level, Tom Hughes long-tenure was a source of order while his searching intellect disciplined our minds. In addition his tenure on the Senate Foreign Relations committee had given him, and through him INR, access to the ranks of the powerful outside the Department. Ray Cline, I think, was less well-received in the Department, being regarded, justly or otherwise, as too much of an advocate for CIA-proposed covert activities abroad. Under Cline's auspices, the bureau levethe previously quite lean became distinctly top-heavy, multiplying bureaucratic procedures and, worse still, reducing the number of parking permits available for the hoi polloi. I left INR too soon after Hyland's arrival to know what impact he had. But the fact that he was Kissinger's protégé must have had some effect on his relations within the Department. At the office level, each of our directors brought strength of his own to our work. We benefited in particular from Averill Harriman's reliance on Allen's briefings on Vietnam carried over from when the Governor had been assistant secretary for East Asia. Fred had unusually good contacts at the Pentagon, especially useful in our work on Vietnam.

Q: When you returned to INR, did you find that Secretary Rusk's injunction that the bureau become more integrated into the Department had in fact been carried out?

COLBERT: In this respect, it's very hard for me to compare INR as I left it with the INR to which I returned. My NIS job, although permitting me to do some non-NIS work from time to time, left me bureaucratically outside the main stream, largely unaware of how INR was functioning inside the Department, what its relations were with the policy bureaus, the Departments principals, and so on. So I can only talk about what I found when I returned and experienced thereafter. On this basis, I can answer your question in the affirmative. But how much, if at all, this differed from the INR I had left two years earlier, I really can't say.

Looking back, it seems to me that INR's briefing system was an important factor in integrating INR into the Department. At the top, INR's director, having himself been briefed earlier by analysts from the various offices, regularly briefed the Secretary and the other principals. Office directors briefed regional bureau assistant secretaries, usually daily, and attended their staff meetings; deputy office directors briefed deputy assistant secretaries. Division chiefs participated in the staff meetings of their counterpart country directorates. Beyond these regularly scheduled responsibilities, we were also called upon on occasion to provide one-time briefings, for example, for newly-appointed ambassadors en route to post. A crisis of some kind might require us to provide daily briefings over a period of time.



One such series was particularly memorable. It took place during the so-called incursion into Laos in 1971 when South Vietnamese troops, supported by U.S. air, invaded Laos seeking to cut off North Vietnamese access to their principal supply route into the south, the Ho Chi Minh trail. The incursion was an operation of major importance. If successful it would be a heavy loss for the Communists. With Vietnamization already underway, it was also a test of the ability of South Vietnamese troops to operate without U.S. support on the ground. Because of the importance the Secretary and the seventh floor principals were to be briefed daily with Bill Gleysteen and I alternating as briefers. Unlike CIA and the military we were entirely lacking in impressive visual aids. But we did have a talented analyst who was able to decorate a large white board map with pictorial explosions showing the location of the day's military encounters. Our major problem was Secretary Rogers himself, nothing in his background as a very successful lawyer having prepared him to deal with the peculiarities of the Ho Chi Minh trail. The fact that he was also being briefed by the military compounded the problem. In the morning, his military briefer would tell him how successfully the operations of the day before had cut the road. At noon we would tell him that there was no road only a web of trails and when one strand of the web was cut the supplies would simply move down another. At one point we thought we had the problem solved, importing a briefer from another part of the community who brought with him a table size three dimensional model of the border between Laos and Vietnam and the mountainous terrain through which the supplies moved. He did an excellent job winding up in customary military style, "This ends the briefing sir. Do you have any questions?" To which the Secretary replied "Which way did you say Vietnam was?"

But back to our integration in the Department, there were other factors that contributed. Among them was Wristonization. Another, harder to define, which perhaps I over-rate, involved overcoming some of our OSS-inherited habits. Well before I returned to INR, the problems Wristonization had initially created the loss of experienced personnel who joined the foreign service or left the Department, the resistance to INR assignments of ambitious FSO had been pretty much overcome. Desk officers and INR analysts, having frequently served together elsewhere, could more easily see one another as colleagues than was always the case when there was a foreign service / civil service, Washington / overseas divide. On Indochina, in particular, the experience and insights of officers coming to us from the field made a very valuable contribution to our work. As to our OSS-inherited habits, what I am talking about is the influence on our product of the fact that in OSS our senior people tended to be academics and many of the rest of us recent graduate school products. Brevity was not really one of our values. Lengthy and detailed accounts evinced gravity of thought and depth of research. Footnotes were a matter of course. It took a while to alter institutional values, to rank brevity high, to accept that devising eye catching forms of presentation was not to succumb to the forces of mindlessness.

Q: What about relations with the rest of the Intelligence Community? Was this important to your work?



COLBERT: In a sense it was part of our work since the frequent requirements for National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) brought us all together and the product both reflected consensus where it existed and defined differences where it did not. But, for day to day purposes our principal relations were with CIA. CIA was responsible not only for producing the now famous President's Daily Brief (PDB) in which we had no part but also a version (containing many of the same items) for lesser mortals with appropriate security clearances. Items published in this version required INR clearance and, since developments in Southeast Asia were of high consumer interest, REA Southeast Asian analysts and CIA analysts were frequently in almost daily communication over the secure phone. There was in addition a good deal of information exchange. CIA with its very large staff was able to follow subjects at a level of detail far beyond our reach while we were more likely to be aware of what was going on at the policy level. And we could also look to CIA number-crunchers for data on subjects requiring their particular skill for example the number of infiltrators from North Vietnam into the South. Outside the estimative process or other interagency projects, contacts with DIA analysts were minimal. This was even more the case with NSA. We received their materials but a separate INR office was responsible for any necessary dealings with the Agency.

Q: Could you go back to the NIEs? How they were prepared and what part you played in their production?

COLBERT: This is a subject I'd like to talk about in even more detail than you might think is necessary. This is because both in the press and in CIA's unclassified histories of its various activities, the impression is given that NIEs are a CIA product. And, having worked very hard in this vineyard for more than a few years, I find that annoying.



To begin at the beginning, or rather at the end, NIEs were issued by the Director of Central Intelligence after they had been approved by the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) composed of the heads of all the intelligence agencies (including Army, Navy, and Air Force) each of whom was entitled to take a footnote to any statement with which he disagreed. An Estimate might be initiated by CIA's Office of National Estimates (ONE) or requested by the Secretary of State or Defense or other high official. Such a request then put in train a rather elaborate process. ONE's staff, composed of senior analysts would first prepare a draft. After the draft was reviewed by ONE's board and perhaps elsewhere in CIA, it was circulated for comment and consideration to the other members of the community. We in REA took this task very seriously considering not only content but also organization and wording. Our proposed changes, more often than not quite extensive, were usually incorporated in new line-in, line out drafts. These, if possible, were circulated in advance of the meetings of representatives of all of the intelligence agencies, or they were brought to the meeting by the INR representatives. These so-called reps meetings usually went on for several days and were quite large. Each agency decided for itself the number of representatives. We usually had two, rarely more. CIA representatives were more numerous the ONE drafters of course but also analysts from the Intelligence Directorate and others, not identified but easily recognized from the Operations Directorate. The meetings were chaired by a member of the board who were, without exception, outstanding intellects and formidable in the chair. Chief among them was Sherman Kent, mentor of us all.

Reps meetings were long and frequently contentious. The draft was reviewed sentence by sentence and revised as we went along. It was advantageous to be able to rewrite on your feet and we and CIA were better at this than DIA. In this process we often departed quite radically from the original draft. Where one agency's representative disagreed with what was otherwise the consensus, he would take a footnote but did not need at this point, to provide a text.

The draft produced after these frequently long debates would then be circulated for clearance. How this worked in the other agencies I don't know. In State, the process was simple. Copies were circulated to the Desk or Desks involved but their comments were in no way binding. Briefing the Director for the USIB meeting on the draft was the key task that, at least in Tom Hughes day, subjected us to a very strenuous cross-examination. He would need to know what problems other agencies had; who was taking footnotes and why. And, under cross-examination, it would often dawn on us that what we were explaining was not the meaning of a sentence but how a compromise was worked out among differing proposals to get a sentence everyone could accept. The result the fuzzy language for which Estimates are often criticized.

Q: Were you in touch at all with foreign embassies?



COLBERT: In terms of exchange of information, our contacts were pretty much limited to the embassies of Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom with which the U.S. had intelligence exchange agreements. Our contacts with Australians were mostly with members of their intelligence service. Those with New Zealanders, in contrast, were with regular members of their foreign service assigned to the embassy to perform the intelligence liaison as well as other functions. This was a much sought-after job awarded to the best and brightest. All of those who served in my time became ambassadors. We saw a good deal of them and became good friends. In 1980, when I retired, all of them sent telegrams and it was only then that I learned they had become known as Evelyn's boys.

Q: Lets go back to September 1962 when you became chief of the Southeast Asia Division. What were things like for you as division chief?

COLBERT: The first thing to say is that the Southeast Asia Division was then very small although it got bigger later. South Vietnam and Laos had one analyst each, the other countries doubled up, and one analyst covered all the economics of the region. The one analyst on North Vietnam belonged to the China Division, a heritage from a brief period when all the Communist countries were grouped on one INR office. But this posed no problem as we worked closely together. The analysts were roughly half foreign service, half civil service.

As you can imagine, we were spread pretty thin to cover a great many developments in which U.S. interests were involved all taking place within the same short period. The neutralization of Laos, established at Geneva in July 1962, had begun to disintegrate almost immediately thereafter. The survival of Malaysia, amalgamating Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak, was being threatened by Sukarno's militant opposition, Philippine territorial claims, and friction between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. In South Vietnam earlier signs of progress in 1962 were fading in the wake of the 1963 Buddhist crisis and the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem. Cambodia under Prince Sihanouk was constantly at odds with our Thai and South Vietnamese allies, vociferously critical of the U.S., and seemingly moving ever closer to the PRC.

All of these developments we needed to follow closely, analyze, and write about. In discussing our work, I'd like to begin with Indonesia for two reasons. First, because, as a major preoccupation, Indonesia came and went, whereas Indochina remained one long after my time. And second, because in the period preceding the October 1965 coup attempt our policy was being increasingly questioned within U.S. government ranks.

Q: Why was this?



COLBERT: The Kennedy administration, attributing much greater importance to Indonesia than had its predecessor, had based its policy on getting along with Sukarno as the only way in which we could hope to influence Indonesia's policy. Thus, in the West Irian dispute, the U.S., in effect, supported Indonesia against the Dutch, hoping that once Indonesia's nationalist aspirations were satisfied Sukarno would abandon his destabilizing policies and, with the added incentive of U.S. aid, turn toward the West. Instead, the reverse proved to be the case. Sukarno's attacks on the United States and western imperialism became even stronger. "To hell with your aid," he told us and, beyond words, were government-inspired riots and attacks on U.S. facilities. Internally, more and more he was favoring the Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI, at the expense of the other parties and the military. Externally he was moving closer to the Communist powers, proclaiming Indonesia a member of what he called the Jakarta-Beijing-Hanoi-Pyongyang axis. And he was receiving military assistance from the USSR including a much publicized battleship.

Q: That was a cruiser, the Smirnoff class, very old and decaying?

COLBERT: Right, and also unsuitable for tropical waters. In this atmosphere, understandably a good deal of our work, including our participation in the estimative process, was focused on Communist advances, not only the successes of the PKI itself but also on its domestic alliances especially with elements of the military. Concerns about the direction of Indonesian-Soviet relations were heightened by a RAND analyst's report that Sukarno had agreed to the establishment of a Soviet missile base on Indonesian soil. Coming in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis from a long-time and very persuasive Indonesia-watcher known for his close relations with a number of Indonesian generals, the report attracted a good deal of apprehensive attention and became the subject of an NIE. Without dissent, the Estimate found little or no prospect that Sukarno would take a step, among other negative factors, so antithetical to Indonesian nationalism. Nor were there any other indications that such a move was in the offing. The problem evaporated as quickly as it had arisen leaving in its wake only some resentment over the time it had consumed.



While Sukarno's policy toward the PKI and the Communist powers boded ill for the future, his Konfrontasi policy was an immediate threat to a constructive decolonization process and was complicating our relations with our Commonwealth allies. In promoting the establishment of Malaysia, the British had sought to divest themselves of their colonial responsibilities while leaving behind a single state rather than four vulnerable small ones. Sukarno, however, chose to denounce the new state as a neocolonial creation, a threat on Indonesia's borders. Like the West Irian campaign, Konfrontasi involved a good deal of heated propaganda, and demonstrations, and attacks on British installations, the destruction of the British Embassy included. But unlike West Irian, it also included military action across border attacks and support for guerilla activity in North Borneo and troop landings and air drops in Singapore and peninsula Malay military action that was being met by British and other Commonwealth forces. As the British saw it, our policy was only encouraging Sukarno's extremism and there was an added complication, the possibility that Australia might invoke the mutual defense provisions of the ANZUS pact. By early 1975 the question of how we should respond had become an issue in particular between our ambassador in Jakarta and his staff.

Q: This was Ambassador Howard Jones?

COLBERT: Yes, Ambassador Jones, a strong supporter of Kennedy administration policy, felt that he understood Sukarno and the Sukarno was his friend. I remember one telegram in which he reported that, after having said something particularly offensive about the U.S., Sukarno patted him on the knee and smiled. He knew, wrote Jones, that I knew what he really meant. Increasingly, however, among the embassy staff the conviction was growing that, by putting so much emphasis on keeping on good terms with Sukarno, we were only encouraging him to stay on course.

Q: Were you in INR aware of these differences?



COLBERT: Oh yes. These things seep out. And, in any case, Jones did not interfere with the flow of information from Jakarta that enabled us to form our own judgments. In addition to embassy and CIA reporting, the FBIS reports printed Sukarno's speeches in full as well as those of PKI leaders and also covered the Indonesian press. Western journalists were also giving some attention to developments in Indonesia. Before Jones, who had long wanted to retire, was replaced by Marshall Green in July 1965, there had been some changes or at least adjustments, in our policy. Avoiding a break with Sukarno remained central. But we were now putting some distance into the relationship. Reducing our exposure to mob attack, USIS and AID operations were terminated, our libraries were closed, the Peace Corps was withdrawn, and the official American presence was otherwise reduced. Marshall's arrival produced no change in Indonesian behavior, but Marshall was adept in maintaining the prescribed American distance while avoiding falling into traps that would have provided Sukarno with occasions for further attacks. An incident described in Marshall's own account of his service in Indonesia well illustrates his technique. He is at a diplomatic reception. Sukarno is saying vile things about the U.S. He should walk out but he knows this will only add fuel to the fire. There is a woman present, a government minister who is reputed to have had a romantic relationship with Sukarno. Marshall turns to her and says, "Madam Supeni, I was so distracted by how beautiful you look in that beautiful dress that I really didn't hear what the President said. Could you repeat it for me?"

Marshall's dexterity, notwithstanding, no improvement seemed to be in sight. However, on October 1, 1965 the scene was decisively changed by an attempted coup involving both the PKI and some military elements and during which six generals were murdered. The coup attempt was suppressed by General Suharto but Sukarno's position, although weakened, remained uncertain for some time thereafter.

Q: Did we have any advance indication of the coup?

COLBERT: No. It was a complete surprise. I have to admit that quite a bit earlier, I had completely discounted the possibility. I had been asked to consider two questions raised, as I recall, by Roger Hilsman: Was a Communist coup attempt likely? And, if one were to take place, would the Indonesian military require U.S. help to put it down? This was one of those occasions when one is asked to provide a paper without involving anyone else. I suppose its sensitivity arose from the suggestion that we were considering adding Indonesia to our military responsibilities in Southeast Asia. I responded that the Communists seemed highly unlikely to mount a coup since they were doing so very well under Sukarno's patronage. But if they did mount a coup, I concluded, their seeming enormous mass support would melt away and the army would be quite capable of putting it down without any help from us. So, I was half right.



Q: I've had a long interview with Bob Martens, who had come from Moscow to Jakarta and applied his Kremlinologist techniques there. How did you view his work?

COLBERT: I don't think we attributed embassy reporting on the PKI to anyone in particular, nor do I recall how valuable embassy reporting on this subject was as compared with other sources. But one aspect of Martens' work has become well known. This was a list of PKI members he compiled by combing through newspapers and other publications, a list he turned over to the army after the coup attempt. His action became the source of allegations that the Embassy had fingered Communists and accordingly was complicit in the blood bath that followed the coup attempt and accompanied the army's suppression of the PKI. This charge has had a life of its own. It was repeated in 2005 in the obituaries of two Indonesian generals who played a conspicuous part in post-coup events. There is no question that Martens kept a list and turned it over. But it is hard to see how anyone knowing anything about the Indonesian military would think that, without the list they would have been unable to identify PKI members.

Q: Talking about the blood bath, Martens reported being asked at a staff meeting how many people he thought had been killed. He responded that, although it was only a guess, he thought maybe 35,000. And that this figure subsequently became holy writ.

COLBERT: Marshall has a somewhat different account, to the effect that he put the question to the staff as a whole and the answers averaged out to 35,000. But memory is fallible. As to holy writ don't think we ever took an official position on the numbers. The embassy was certainly in no position to do so. The killings took place in areas where there was no American presence or access, some of it in remote villages where it seemed to be grass roots reactions to Communist expropriation campaigns and affronts to Islam.

Q: Again I go back to my interview with Bob Martens who believed that Sukarno was getting closer to declaring himself the supreme leader of the region's Communists so that, in our dealings with him, time was not on our side.

COLBERT: Whatever may have been in Sukarno's mind I should add that Bob was convinced that Sukarno had been a card-carrying Communist from earliest day the idea is really quite implausible. One would have to imagine that the North Vietnamese, the North Koreans, the Chinese Communists would accept Sukarno as their self-proclaimed leader. Or that even in Southeast Asia alone, the most significant Communist insurgent movements of the mid-sixties, those in Thailand and Malaysia, mostly ethnic Chinese in composition, would have put themselves under Indonesian leadership.



Q: Another report, as I understand it, about the U.S. role, was put out by a number of Indonesian specialists, academics from Cornell.

COLBERT: Roughly speaking, with nothing to correct my memory, their contention was that the coup attempt was organized by the military to provide them with an excuse to destroy the PKI and that perhaps the U.S. was in some way complicit. This didn't make them very popular with the State Department.

Q: Before this, had they been among your sources and did the report affect the Department's relations with Cornell?

COLBERT: The Indonesian Program at Cornell under George Kahin had pioneered Indonesian studies in the U.S. after World War II and its publications were read by anyone with a serious interest in the country. In my office, our only direct contact with a Cornell Indonesian scholar before the coup was with Ruth McVey, a leading expert on the PKI. She spent a good deal of time in Indonesia and had extended conversations with Communist leaders. Her expertise made her a welcome visitor in REA and elsewhere in Washington. In the post-coup era, of course, the PKI ceased to be a subject of current interest and McVey herself moved on to other topics. As far as I am aware, the Department's official contacts with Cornell involved only sending FSOs there for language and area training and this program was not interrupted by the coup attempt and its aftermath.

Q: After the coup attempt was put down, where did it seem to you that Indonesia was going?

COLBERT: There was considerable uncertainty about this. Although Sukarno's presence at Halim Air Force base, the coup center, and other factors as well seemed to implicate him in the coup, General Suharto, now in command of the armed forces, took no immediate action against him. Sukarno remained president and there was great concern over his possible return to power. I experienced the continued preoccupation of the diplomatic community with Sukarno when in Jakarta in, I think, January 1967 I attended one of the periodic luncheons where the DCMs of friendly embassies exchanged news and views. One of them had just attended one of Sukarno's receptions and everyone else was full of question: How did he look? Were his feet swollen? Whom had he talked to? What did he say? Suharto's slow pace was a source of anxiety and we were kept busy reading the tea leaves. But in March 1967, after what had seemed to be a long period of uncertainty, the suspense came to an end. Responding to an ultimatum from the military, Sukarno signed a statement making Suharto acting president with full authority to take any steps necessary to ensure peace and stability. The New Order was now unquestionably under way with Suharto clearly in charge and, from Washington's perspective, moving in the right direction.



Q: How did this affect U.S. policy and REA work in particular?

COLBERT: Of course, we continued to do the usual analysis of developments that seemed important. The Indonesian political scene remained fairly lively. However, a major task we were assigned at this time had to do with Indonesia's economic recovery. Sukarno's policies had driven the economy into the ground; his approach was epitomized when he announced that neckties were more important than trousers. But Suharto's New Order seemed to be genuinely committed to recovery and development along lines recommended by a group of U.S.-trained Indonesian economists—the so-called Berkeley mafia. Supporting Indonesia's economic recovery in cooperation with other foreign donors became central to U.S. policy. In this connection, we were asked to study Indonesia's capacity to utilize large-scale economic assistance. This was a difficult task. Our database could not have been more inadequate. Earlier economic reporting on Sukarno's disastrous policies could not now be of much help. Attempting to weigh the factors involved we took into account Suharto's good intentions, his reliance on the Berkeley mafia, Indonesia's rich resources, and its large population. But we weighed against these factors the total degradation of the economy, the prevalence of corruption inside and outside the government, the inefficiency and labyrinthine procedures of an antiquated government service, and the domination of the entrepreneurial class by the disesteemed overseas Chinese. The resulting paper took a gloomy view. I don't remember it in any detail but, from today's perspective, I suspect that it was probably much too pessimistic.

Q: There have been some claims that, if we hadn't already been heavily involved in Indochina in 1965, the Indonesian army would not have had the courage to turn against Sukarno.

COLBERT: Bill Bundy, when he was assistant secretary, made this claim very publicly. The Indonesians were furious and they were right. They did it themselves. Marshall was very aware of Indonesian sensitivities. During the anxious transition period, he never let it be seen that the U.S. was 100 percent behind Suharto and trying to help him.

Q: That is certainly the view of the people I've talked to who were serving in the embassy at the time. But you mentioned corruption as a problem. Of course, the Suharto regime became terribly corrupt and this was a factor in bringing it down. Did you see this corruption developing?

COLBERT: What we saw was that corruption played an important role under Suharto as it had under Sukarno—perhaps more of one since there was more of an economy to exploit. And, over time, Suharto's wife and children became foremost among the corrupt. So the question for us as analysts was not whether there was corruption, it was the extent to which corruption was having a negative impact on economic performance and to what extent it was arousing politically potent criticism and opposition.



As a negative factor in U.S. relations with Indonesia, it was certainly outweighed by the positive ones. Not the least of these, was the stimulus the New Order provided to the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) relations with which were to become an important component of U.S. East Asian policy. Moves toward regional organization in the past had been obstructed by a number of factors among which Sukarno's policies had been one of the more important. This obstacle was now overcome and Indonesia's foreign minister had become a prime mover in ASEAN's establishment with Indonesian's role thereafter an important factor in the organization's success.

We in the Intelligence Community failed to recognize the potential importance of this new regional organization. We focused on the negative factors: the wide differences in ethnicity and religion; long-standing bilateral antagonisms and border disputes; insufficient trained personnel to staff a new organization. We failed to recognize important psychological factors. One of these of great importance was ASEAN's role in developing contacts, indeed intimacy, among leaders who previously had had minimal contact with one another, had not even visited one another's countries. The long tenures most of these leaders enjoyed contributed to and reinforced the ties that developed among them. We failed also to recognize the importance of the fact that ASEAN had been created and its functions determined by Southeast Asians themselves, unlike SEATO devised and its terms of reference determined by the U.S. One of the obstacles we had cited, the difficulty of establishing a regional bureaucracy turned out to be an advantage avoiding the problems of the Brussels model, the gap between the decisions of technocrats and political reality.

Another case where we as estimators failed to give adequate credit to psychological factors involved Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. We were quite aware of the problems Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew's policies were posing for the Tunku and his Malay constituents. But we concluded only days, as I recall, before the expulsion, that other factors, economic interdependence in particular, would preserve the relationship. We failed to give adequate weight to the Tunku's deep dislike of Lee going back to their Cambridge days when the Tunku had been the playboy prince and Lee the striving Chinese, hard-working, brilliant, and making himself felt as a coming man. Nor did we give sufficient weight to Malay fears that Lee's proposed substitution of multiculturalism for the traditional division of power for the Malays, economic for the Chinese was merely a device through which the Chinese would achieve political as well as economic domination.

Q: We seem to have reached 1967. Perhaps now we should go back a few years. In 1962, when you took over the Southeast Asia Division, how did Indochina look to you?



COLBERT: Essentially as a single problem with three inter-related problems: Laos, still the center of immediate attention; Cambodia, a problem but a peripheral one; and Vietnam where our basic interests were at stake.

In Laos, neutralization was already becoming a fiction but a useful one, providing a façade behind which outside powers the United States and Thailand, North Vietnam, the PRK, and the USSR supported their respective Lao client neutralists, rightists, and Communists. For analysts two questions constantly recurred. Could the neutral façade for which Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma was the indispensable element survive factional conflicts? Would the Communist forces carry their attacks into the Mekong lowlands, thereby destroying the Geneva façade? Our own courses of action also carried this danger and I remember at least one occasion when we were asked to produce an Estimate concerning U.S. policy choices. Requested by Secretary Rusk, the Estimate was to consider the possible consequences of sending U.S. troops into Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail. We foretold dire consequences on the ground with the possibility of a Chinese and Soviet role of some kind and, as well, negative reactions elsewhere in the international community. We suspected, at the time, that the Secretary had anticipated our conclusions when he requested the Estimate.

Cambodia was not yet involved in the Indochina war. Nevertheless, Sihanouk's policies his relations with his neighbors, his efforts to manipulate Cold War rivalries to Cambodia's advantage made for problems that required attention and analysis.

Vietnam, of course, was the big show, a theatre in which in 1962 the U.S. was implementing new policies devised by the Kennedy administration. The administration came into office believing as strongly as its predecessor in the domino theory and the importance to the U.S. of preventing a Communist takeover in South Vietnam. Facing Communist advances in the countryside, they saw this and other problems as arising less from anything having to do with Vietnam itself than from what we were doing ourselves or what we were telling the Vietnamese to do. Their new approach was embodied in the concepts of counter-insurgency and nation-building. We would continue to support President Ngo Dinh Diem, as we had been doing since 1954, and the South Vietnamese army (ARVN). But Diem was to be encouraged to seek greater contact with and popularity among the people. ARVN, hitherto organized and trained to face a Communist assault across the DMZ, was instead to turn Communist tactics against the VC providing security to the countryside by emphasizing mobility and small unit actions and winning peasant support through significantly improved behavior. Programs implementing increased U.S. aid were to be more consciously directed by U.S. advisors to nation building and winning hearts and minds. Measuring progress was thus an important part of our work as well as tracing developments on the Communist side.



Thus, we had a great many things to keep track of and a very small staff with which to do so. To be sure, over time our staff increased and its expertise was significantly reinforced by the assignment of FSOs fresh from the field and with area and language training. And we could turn to our China Division when the PRC role was involved. But at no time did we have more than eight analysts on all of Indochina as compared with the platoons at CIA and DIA which enjoyed the luxury of assigning analysts to individual pieces of the problem.

However, our small size had a number of advantages. Our analysts were more likely than those in CIA, and certainly DIA, to see the big picture. Perhaps because we did not have multitudes of people to supervise and a many-layered bureaucratic structure, from our office directors on down, we regarded ourselves not as managers but as senior analysts. We contributed to what was written and what was briefed as much as we supervised it. And we were fortunate, or clever, or maybe some of both, in the people who were recruited as our staff got larger. We had a really outstanding crew.

To be sure, our small size made it impossible for us to cover some subjects adequately. Large subjects requiring manipulation of lots of numbers. These included subjects in considerable dispute: the size of the infiltration flow and of the Communist armed forces; the impact of our bombing in Laos on the flow of supplies to the Communists in the South. In the debates on these issues our major resource was common sense and we tended to support CIA estimates, unlike DIA's, untainted by political pressures. But both agencies in arriving at their estimates relied on what they called methodologies that were uncertain at best.

Q: Of course, the thing is, having been on the ground, I know so many of those figures are fake. Hamlet evaluations and all of that. Bunch of nonsense.

COLBERT: Early in Ray Cline's tenure, because of some meeting he had to attend, he wanted to know something about how bomb damage assessments were being calculated. I called the CIA analyst in charge of these calculations whom I trusted to give me a straight answer. First, he described DIA's methodology. And I said, "That doesn't make much sense does it?" And he said, "no." Then I said, "How do you do it." And when he told me I said, "That doesn't make much sense either, does it?" And he said, "No, it doesn't."

Q: How did you find the quantity and quality of other kinds of information available to you?

COLBERT: In quantity, very large indeed. It varied in quality, of course, but we had enough from enough sources to give us some confidence in our ability to sift the good from the bad.



Embassy reporting was voluminous as was CIA's. FSOs assigned to the provincial reporting program reported on local developments. A very large group of talented journalists aggressively supplemented the official flow. Opportunities to interview returning FSOs, military officers, journalists, and miscellaneous visitors were numerous. Our access to the Communist-side, leadership decisions and divisions, was of course very limited. The only independent reporting I can recall from Hanoi was provided by a British representative, a remarkable woman later the subject of a New Yorker profile. I believe her responsibilities were consular and she had no access to the regime. Her reports were confined to what she could observe. Within the restrictions imposed on her movements and her contacts, her reports provided insights into such subjects as economic activity, corruption, and morale. Even within the limits imposed by a Communist regime, there was much material from which we could learn. Speeches by Communist leaders to which they were much given were carried in full by FBIS. Captured documents were useful in our analysis of Communist objectives and strategy and the themes they were using to gain support and to indoctrinate their cadres. The work of RAND corporation analysts in the field was also very useful, the results of their POW interrogations in particular which cast a good deal of light on Viet Cong discipline and morale and on the relations between the cadres who had remained in the South after 1954 and those who had later been infiltrated from the North. For some subjects, for example, the presence and movements in the South of units of the North Vietnamese army (PAVN, later NVA), technical means provided most of such information as we had.

Q: What you say certainly seems to contradict Robert McNamara's claims that we didn't understand, didn't know what was going on.

COLBERT: McNamara, it seems to me, attributes his mistakes to other people's ignorance. It is true that, when the U.S. became involved in Southeast Asia after World War II, few Americans knew very much about the region in general, Indochina in particular. But even then, we already knew enough in DRF to understand the contribution of nationalism to the Communist cause. And by the 60s, much had been accomplished both in academia and by government-supported programs providing language and area training. I'm not arguing that we in the Intelligence Community and others as well, who were mining the data available to us, were always right. But we were right I think on most of the basic issues and trends.

Q: Didn't McNamara rely mostly on numberbody counts and so forth?

COLBERT: He was certainly big on numbers and he had a number-crunching office of his own. They did something called systems analysis which was going to tell us everything we needed to know. They may have told McNamara, but I don't remember that they made any contribution to the Vietnam debate.



Q: As you kept on working the problem were there times when you were optimistic, other times when you concluded we just aren't going to make this?

COLBERT: I don't think there was any period in which we didn't see significant failures in performance. The first NIE in which I was involved late in 1962 took a pretty bleak view of the situation, particularly ARVN's performance. But, as I recall, it also stressed the opportunities for progress better implementation of counter-insurgency strategies would provide. It was also in 1962 and 1963 that the Buddhist crisis and other events led us to put greater emphasis on the obstacles to progress stemming from the practices and policies of Ngo Dinh Diem and his family. But we anticipated that, if Diem refused to change, there were others who could replace him and perform more effectively. The aftermath of Diem's assassination in November 1963 soon began to call this optimism into question. In 1964, for example, seven governments came and went in the course of the year. Thereafter, government change by coup, continuing Buddhist-military conflict, poor ARVN performance, and other such factors induced pessimism always, however, qualified by attention to new developments that seemed to promise better performance and by optimism that, if so and so properly implemented U.S.-supported programs, the situation would improve. But, at least by the mid-sixties we had begun to lose faith in the possibility of improvements on our side that, more than delaying a Communist victory, would actually prevent it. In 1967 when General Nguyen Van Thieu became president, remaining in office until the fall of Saigon in 1975, the political scene seemingly became more stable. But we saw Thieu's ability to remain in power not as moving us closer to our nation-building objectives but as owing to his coercive capabilities and his skill in manipulating army factions. Nor did the increasing deployment of U.S. military power appear to us to improve ARVN performance. The introduction of U.S. ground troops, it had been anticipated, would relieve ARVN of some of its major combat role to the benefit of its counter-insurgency mission. This hope was not fulfilled and Saigon's power structure, civil and military, as we saw it continued to be dominated by self-interest, factionalism, and corruption.

If we were pessimistic about Saigon's will and capacity to resist, we were equally pessimistic about the impact of our policies on Hanoi's pursuit of its objectives and its capabilities for achieving them. We saw it as unlikely that Hanoi could be forced by bombing or induced by bombing halts to abandon its determination to reunify Vietnam under Communist auspices whatever cost and damage North Vietnam might incur in the process. And we cited Soviet and Chinese interest in Hanoi's success, as well as their own growing competition, as guaranteeing that they would continue to fulfill Hanoi's requirements for military equipment and assistance in repairing bomb damage.

Q: Was your pessimism shared by other members of the Intelligence Community or were there deep differences?



COLBERT: Pessimism about the situation as a whole was fairly general. But there were significant differences over the elements of the problem at any given time to cause us to spend days in smoke-filled rooms seeking to reach an agreed NIE text. The deepest differences, as I recall, had to do with the effects of our efforts to cut off Communist supplies, the size of the Communist fighting forces, and the possibility of Chinese military intervention. On the impact of the bombing, I referred earlier to the rather dubious calculations involved. We tended to support CIA in estimates on the low side; DIA and air force intelligence took a more positive view. On communist military manpower, the debate was largely over what elements of the Communist force structure, conventional and otherwise, should be included in the order of battle. Here CIA and INR took the more inclusive view. The dispute was settled in a meeting in Saigon attended by representatives of the Washington agencies, including REA, and of MACV. More than anything else, horse-trading dominated the outcome.

On Chinese intervention, until 1967, INR rated the possibility somewhat higher than other members of the community. We were all agreed that Chinese military intervention in some form was likely if the regime in Hanoi seemed on the verge of collapse or if US/ARVN forces were to invade the North. But REA also saw the possibility of PRC intervention in the air as raised by some of Beijing's statements and new deployments of Chinese air assets. Seeing a greater likelihood than others that China might introduce ground forces, we argued that Hanoi's fear of Chinese domination would be outweighed if it perceived a vital need for Chinese assistance. But we also argued that, even under such circumstances, Hanoi would continue to control its own strategy. However, China's failure to respond to the bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area and the disorder accompanying the Cultural Revolution led us to join the rest of the community in restricting the likelihood of Chinese intervention to the invasion of the North or the imminent collapse of the regime.

Q: Could you talk about the Tet Offensive and its effect this is in January 1968.



COLBERT: In the military sense this was certainly not a success for the Communists. They took a lot of casualties. They lost a major part of their South Vietnamese infrastructure. They had to retreat from the cities they had occupied. And if they really expected the general uprising they told their cadres would, at some point, accompany their military campaigns, they were certainly disappointed. But the fact that it was a military success on our part and a military failure on theirs was not necessarily the point. The psychological effects in South Vietnam and the U.S. were what really counted. Up until Tet, the hostilities had impinged mainly on the countryside. People in the cities and big towns lived more or less normal lives, many benefiting economically from the U.S. presence. Now Tet had brought home to the urban population the reality of Communist power, the likelihood that the Communists would win, and, therefore, the advisability of not seeming to take sides with the government and the U.S. In the U.S., until Tet, Washington had told the country that we were winning, that the light was at the end of the tunnel, and that the Communists were being driven into the ground. So inevitably the question arose if you have been telling the truth, how is it that the Communists were able to attack 100 cities and towns all over the South, even attack the American Embassy. Opposition to the war began to spread much more widely and into more politically potent circles.

Q: Did you find the unhappiness of the American people seeping into your evaluation?

COLBERT: Not directly but certainly in our analysis of how estimates of our staying power affected Communist strategy and what tactics they were adopting less for their military value than for their hoped-for impact on American attitudes.

Q: Were you at any time put under pressure from outside INR to bring your analysis into greater conformity with official positions?

COLBERT: My feeling most of the time was that we were saying, "The Emperor has no clothes on." and our masters were saying, "Yes, but doesn't he look beautiful that way?" In general, we were left to do our own thing, perhaps because as is so well argued in Gelb and Betts, *The System Worked*, our pursuit of the war was less determined by how it was going than by potent political compulsions. And, except for Daniel Ellsberg, we didn't leak.

There were a few instances of pressure but not enough to cause us to change our ways. The very pessimistic tone of the first Estimate in which I was involved was greeted by protests from DOD and MACV which caused USIB to send it back to us for reconsideration. In the process, we were lectured by a number of generals about how and why we were so wrong. In its final form the Estimate remained pessimistic but somewhat less so.



On another occasion in 1963 DOD took exception to one of our papers the title of which is lost to memory, but which is known as RFE 90. It was a short and simple paper which, using MACV statistics, demonstrated that the Communists were taking the offensive against ARVN and doing well. This evoked a memo from McNamara to Rusk asserting that military statistics were DOD's affair not State's and demanding that INR be instructed to observe this distinction. In due course the Secretary sent back a rather vaguely worked memo while the complaint had no impact on our work nor, despite much later accounts, on the fate of its author who was twice promoted thereafter, reaching the highest grade then available in the civil service.

The only other such incident I can remember took place after the Paris Peace Accords involving a paper detailing the way in which they were being violated by both North and South Vietnamese as each side sought to strengthen its position. The attribution of violations to the South Vietnamese so aroused the ire of Graham Martin, our ambassador in Saigon, that he sent a letter to one of INR's deputy directors denouncing the author in what could only be described as McCarthyite terms. Our deputy director had earlier worked for Martin in Rome and was very disturbed by the letter but it was not too difficult to convince him that the analysis was sound and we heard no more.

Q: At any point, were you called upon to brief Dean Rusk or any of the other seventh floor principals?

COLBERT: This of course was Tom Hughes' job and that of course, was the way that REA's views could be brought to higher levels. Sometimes, however, we were asked to write memos to an unidentified consumer from an unidentified author which we suspected meant that someone important was being addressed outside regular channels. One such request called for an estimate of the consequences of introducing U.S. ground forces not too long before the decision to do so. We contested the argument that this would cause the North Vietnamese troops, now in the South in large numbers, to stand and fight thereby subjecting themselves to our massive firepower. We expected instead that they would encounter U.S. forces only at times of their own choosing and in circumstances that would make them reasonably confident of success.

Another such unsourced, unaddressed task came in the wake of one of those missions to Hanoi code named Daffodil and the like and entrusted to foreign nationals to solicit Communist views on a peace treaty. I remember reading the account of their conversations in a remote little room with the door shut and finding that nothing these emissaries had learned conflicted with our view that the Communists would settle for nothing less than a political arrangement that would open their path to power in Saigon.



Q: In the spring of 1970 there was an incursion into Cambodia that caused a number of FSOs to resign and many more to sign a document protesting the move. Did this have any reverberations within INR?

COLBERT: Oh yes, indeed! We all thought it was madness, anticipating that any damage to North Vietnamese capabilities would be temporary and that Cambodia would be drawn into a wider war to the benefit of the Communists. In this we were right but earlier we had been wrong in significantly underestimating the volume of supplies the Communists had stockpiled in the Cambodian border area en route to South Vietnam. In earlier consideration of the desirability of some sort of incursion into Cambodia, proponents had argued that cutting off the supply route would inflict major damage on the Communists. Contesting this view, strongly held in Saigon, INR and CIA argued that the Cambodia supply route was not indispensable, and that the damage to the Communists would be only temporary. As the incursion demonstrated, we had significantly underestimated the Communist stockpiles in the Cambodian border area but we were right that no lasting damage would be inflicted, while the incursion and the events that followed provided a springboard for the eventual Khmer Rouge takeover.

Q: Cambodia aside, did the advent of the Nixon administration bring about any change in INR's role?

COLBERT: Not really. Changes in personnel and style certainly but neither in mission or influence. To the extent that we had had access to the seats of power, it had been through Tom Hughes; I don't think Ray Cline had any similar access. At some point when I was already at Brookings there was some slight reason to think that Henry Kissinger was actually interested in the views of the Intelligence Community since he had asked for answers to a very large number of questions, somewhere in the vicinity of 100. But the cynical view soon emerged that he was just trying to keep us busy.

Q: You mentioned your absence at the Brookings Institutions for a year. How did that come about?



COLBERT: I had something called a Federal Executive Fellowship under which, while the government continued to pay your salary, you could spend a year at Brookings just reading or writing or both. I had heard about the program not from Personnel or anybody else in the Department but from a college classmate who had been nominated by the National Science Foundation. For some time, I had seen the absence of a diplomatic history of post-war Southeast Asia as a gap that needed to be filled. Fred Greene, from his academic vantage point, confirmed my impression that no such study existed. Henry Owen, formerly head of the Planning Staff and now Brookings' director of studies, assured me that, if I were nominated by the State Department, Brookings would be glad to have me. Ray Cline agreed in principle but insisted that I could not leave until a suitable replacement had been found for Bill Gleysteen, who was about to become DCM in Taipei. Until Bill's replacement had been found and settled in, I was needed to run the office. It was quite a while before Paul Popple arrived, persuaded Mort Abramowitz to replace me for a year, and settled in. A process that I had initiated sometime in the spring of 1971 took me to Brookings in February 1972.

The contrast with my life in the Department could not have been greater. Brookings, unlike the Carnegie Endowment where I spent some time after I retired, was anything but collegial. People arrived in the morning, closed their door, and went to work. Events designed for fellows as a group were few and far between. Office space, secretarial assistance, and, for my purposes, library resources were minimal. So I spent most of my time working at home or at the State Department or other libraries around town. Liberated from interruptions and distractions, and given a three-month extension, I managed to produce a finished manuscript covering the period from World War II to 1956. This was at least a logical breaking point, although not as far as I would have liked to go. I say finished but only in the sense that I had a complete manuscript. It took quite a bit of revision, reorganization, and general improvement, not to mention dealing with the editorial process once it had been accepted by the Cornell University Press, before it was finally published in 1976.

Q: So you went back to INR in May 1973 and remained there until when?

COLBERT: A little less than a year, leaving for CIA in March 1974. By the time I returned the Paris peace settlement was in effect, the last American troops had left Vietnam in March, and the U.S.-China rapprochement was well under way. So, while there was still much to cover in Indochina, the pace was somewhat less intense even though it still kept us quite busy. Meanwhile, looking back at our other preoccupations, it seems to me that this short period in East Asia was marked by an unusual number of events that were harbingers of things to come. These included not only developments in the PRC but also, in South Korea, the emergence of Kim Dae Jung as a significant opposition figure, in Thailand, the 1973 student revolution, and, in the Philippines, Marcos' suspension of the constitution, the imposition of martial law, and the beginnings of the Moro insurgency.



Q: So you moved to CIA in March 1974. How did that come about?

COLBERT: It was not a decision I moved to quickly. I was very comfortable where I was. I knew all the people I needed to know; they knew me; and we seemed to be happy together. I knew what doors to knock on and what buttons to push. But, on the other hand, I would not just be going from State to the Agency. I would be becoming part of a new structure with new functions in the Agency and the Community. So this seemed to offer a new challenge and perhaps this was something I needed. I knew Bill Colby. I knew his deputy for the new NIO system, George Carver, very well having worked with him on Vietnam and other Estimates since 1962. And this was true of a lot of other people in the Agency. So in the end I decided that for the two years I would be detailed it was worth a try.

Q: Just what was this new system and how was it organized?

COLBERT: As conceived by Bill Colby, then DCI, the National Intelligence Officers, each an expert in his particular region or function, were to serve as his senior substantive staff, assume the responsibilities of the now-abolished Office of National Estimates, and play a coordinating role both in CIA and the Intelligence Community. In line with Colby's hopes to bring about greater interchange between the Community and other related agencies, State in particular, and with academics and think tank people, the NIOs were not to be drawn exclusively from CIA ranks. Each regional and functional area of significance to U.S. policy was to have an NIO. (At this time there was no NIO for South Asia or for Africa.) Uniquely there were to be three NIOs for East Asia: one on Indochina and Thailand, still a full time responsibility, best filled by a CIA officer to ensure the cooperation of the Operations Directorate; and two to be filled from State, one on China and one, identified as Japan and Pacific Asia, to cover everything not included in the other two. This was to be my job. China, however, proved to be more difficult to fill from State Department ranks. FSOs of appropriate rank and expertise aspiring to eventual ambassadorial nominations were unwilling to risk a CIA assignment that might later unfavorably affect the assignment process. In the end, the China slot was not filled until George Bush became DCI and brought with him Jim Lilly who had been his station chief in Beijing.

Other than myself, of the original group of NIOs, only two came from outside the Agency, an academic from RAND as the NIO for economics and, from DOD, an admiral who covered conventional forces. The deputies, one for each NIO, were all from the Agency. After the fall of Saigon, the NIO for Indochina became NIO for South Asia and I inherited his earlier responsibilities. China also eventually became part of East Asia but I don't know when that happened.



The NIO system at that time had very little structure. We were collegial to the extent that we shared office suites and that we met together with Colby to report to him on developments in our areas and to hear from him whatever he wanted to tell us. We also met from time to time under George Carver's chairmanship mostly to hear from him information or instructions that affected us all. Otherwise, however, we performed our substantive roles as individuals responsible to the DCI, joining forces with one or another of our NIO colleagues when our substantive responsibilities overlapped.

Q: How were the NIO's functions defined at that time?

COLBERT: Some quite specifically, others more amorphously. The most clear cut had to do with the production of National Intelligence Estimate outlining the terms of reference, establishing requirements, reviewing original drafts, presiding over representative meetings, and presenting the final draft to the DCI. Although we inherited the board's responsibilities, we did not inherit the staff that had been responsible for producing the initial text. Colby had hoped that this responsibility could be shared with other elements of the community called upon to produce drafts on subjects for which their responsibilities best suited them. This never really worked out and, at least in my area, drafts were normally the result of NIO/DI collaboration.

NIOs were also expected to coordinate any intelligence contribution required for various types of policy papers the most important of which were the PRMs of the Carter administration and the NSSMs of the Nixon administration. These sometimes required written contributions, at other times participation in working group meetings. We were also expected to keep the DCI informed of important and prospective developments in our fields of responsibility. This of course was a function which, in fact, we shared with other, sometimes highly competitive colleagues. We were also expected to involve ourselves in the rather elaborate machinery that had developed to define intelligence collection and goals. Except in the case of Korea, where it became possible to move the machinery in the direction of better collection on the North, I found this a pretty pro-forma process.

NIOs were supposed to be active in promoting Colby's interest in encouraging greater Agency interchange with policy makers and outside specialists. The individual NIO was expected not only to maintain active contact with State, Defense, and NSC counterparts but also to encourage DI analysts to do the same. Also, in the interests of greater communication with the academic world, we were encouraged to bring scholars in for conferences. Attendance at meetings of learned societies was supported for NIOs and DI analysts in general and we were to identify ourselves there as working for CIA. Attending a meeting of the American Historical Association where I had been asked to read a paper based on an article I had written for Foreign Affairs during my Brookings interlude, I found myself in a crowded elevator standing next to an elderly priest. Studying my badge, he asked, "What's a nice lady like you doing working for an outfit like that?"



Q: You could have said, "Just lucky, I guess."

COLBERT: Yes. Or if I'd been a little quicker on the draw, I could have rejoined, "What's a nice man like you working for the Pope?" But I'm not very good at that sort of thing.

Q: You've described a pretty ambitious agenda. How did it work in practice?

COLBERT: Certainly not to the extent that Colby must have hoped. But well enough to survive down to the present, now in a somewhat more structured form as the National Intelligence Council and, most recently, to be attached to John Negroponte's office.

From the outset DOD reacted suspiciously and defensively, suspecting that the system's object was to give the DCI real authority over the overwhelmingly large proportion of the intelligence budget allocated to the Defense Department and perhaps even to replace the DOD in authority over the important intelligence organizations falling under its jurisdiction. Sometime later, I don't remember when, DIA set up its own system of Defense Intelligence Officers (DIO). Presumably this was intended to prevent NIOs from engaging in direct tasking or other overly close involvement with DIA offices. In fact it proved to be a blessing providing a much needed central contact for dealing with DIA. My DIO was a pleasure to work with, bright, helpful, experienced and well-versed in Pentagon ins and outs.

For other parts of the Agency, the new system insofar as its functions and authority extended beyond those of the Board of National Estimates could be seen as threatening established prerogatives. And Colby was in no position to sweep all before him. The DCI is no exception to the rule that an agency head's strength is affected by the strength of his political backing. And Colby was just an old CIA hand, a very distinguished one to be sure, but he wasn't the president's man or anyone else's man. And he had aroused some resentment in the DO because of his willingness to cooperate with the Congressional investigations of the period and even the press. But the proof of the pudding is, after all, in the eating. The system has survived for over thirty years while many other innovations have fallen by the wayside.

Q: After all of your years in the Department, how did the transition to the Agency affect you?

COLBERT: My immediate transition was vastly eased by my first deputy, a GS-15 Agency veteran who, in addition to his many other talents, was a magnificent guide to CIA's ins and outs.



On the whole, the move turned out well. There was no lack of interesting work to do. Being staff not line was in many ways a pleasant change. Without line authority over the DI, I had no responsibility over the work of its analysts. I didn't give them their assignments. I didn't write their performance ratings. I didn't adjudicate their turf fights. But I could rely on their cooperation in the projects for which I was responsible and, over time, I found I could suggest topics and offer comments on some of the things they were doing.

I was under no illusions that my coordinating responsibilities extended to the DO and I needed to move carefully to secure DO cooperation when it was necessary. But I had no serious problems and I got a little extra credit among the remaining OSS veterans for having been one of them. It didn't hurt either that, as compared to life in INR, NIOs lived high on the homore attractive offices, much better services, much more money for travel, cars available more or less on call, top secretaries.

The things to which I reacted less favorably had more to do with the Agency itself than with my own job. Perhaps because it was so much bigger than State, it was much more bureaucratithis, I would think to myself, is what the Department of Agriculture must be like. And, perhaps, partly because of its immunity at that time from political appointments below the top, it was very much an age pyramid. The closest thing to a Dick Holbrooke, assistant secretary at age 35, was George Carver, and he was in his mid-forties.

I was also surprised to find that the very high quality of the CIA people I had worked with over the years largely in the estimative process was not full representative of Agency analytic personnel as a whole. As I suppose is frequently the case, areas in constant crisis or of great strategic importance to the United States tend somehow to draw the brightest, the most energetic, the most ambitious. In other areas where the challenge was less great, there were, I found, quite a few analysts who were happy to lead a quiet life, enjoy trips to the field, and produce papers but who, when the need arose, were not always useful performers. Even among the really good analysts, many seemed to live in a cocoon. The rest of the world, the State Department included, was downtown. You didn't go there.

Q: Perhaps you could talk now about the more important policy-related problems that you dealt with as NIO.

COLBERT: From that point of view, it was a pretty lively three years, involving the production of quite a few Estimates and participation after 1976 in the policy papers a new administration initiates. Most of the Estimates passed through the USIB process with no particular difficulty; two did not, one on international reactions to the fall of Saigon, the other on the military balance on the Korean peninsula. I'll save these to talk about more extensively and deal with the others first.



Some of the Estimates in which I was involved during this period were of the temperature taking variety, a look at the situation and prospects, unrelated to a policy decision or a particular crisis. Estimates on Indonesia and the Philippines reached similar conclusions: both faced serious problems and opposition but in both the regime was firmly in control. In Malaysia, the Communists had become more active and there were indications that they might soon engage in urban warfare but we concluded that the situation was manageable. Probably stimulated by one of North Korea's periodic threatening actions, we took another look at the possibility of a military assault on the South but found no reason to depart from the conclusion that as long as U.S. troops were in the DMZ, North Korea would not attack the South.

New concern with Soviet activities in the South Pacific as most of the island countries were becoming independent was aroused by reports of Soviet discussions of a naval base with the King of Tonga coupled with the buildup of the previously neglected Soviet Pacific fleet. The questions of Soviet intentions was thus ripe for estimative treatment especially since an ANZUS Council meeting was imminent and the subject was as interesting to our ANZUS partners as to ourselves. Although we were dealing primarily with Soviet intentions and it was Soviet specialists who were doing most of the work, I was designated to chair the Estimate meetings. Part of the answer to the questions Soviet activities had raised was reassuring and caused no dissension around the table. It had to do with fish. With the Russian diet heavily dependent on fish for protein, the Soviets were beginning to run into supply problems. Some of their traditional fishing grounds were becoming exhausted; others were being closed to them for political reasons. Hence a search for new sources of supply was bringing them into waters where they had never fished before, waters very rich in tuna. This left the question why the new Soviet Pacific fleet buildup and here I failed in an effort to substitute clear disagreement for fudge. I no longer remember the substance of several paragraphs in the draft to which only the Navy objected. Pressed to take a footnote they refused to do so for reasons that seemed somewhat mysterious to us but important to them. Accordingly, to get the Estimate out we agreed to fudge in return for a Navy commitment to provide a separate Estimate on the fleet issue which, at least in my time, they never did. A subject now, of course, of interest only to historians.

Q: Were you involved in the tree-cutting incident on the DMZ? I was consul general in Seoul and it was a very scary time.



COLBERT: You're right, it was. On the day the news came in that North Korean troops had attacked American troops cutting down a tree in the DMZ and beaten two officers to death, Kissinger and a number of the other principals were in Kansas City attending the Republican nominating convention. Accordingly an NSC meeting could not be held until early the following morning, around 6 a.m. or so. Immediately, however, a working group had been established under Phil Habib, then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, and, as the Intelligence Community member, I was asked to remain at the State Department for an all night session at the Operations Center. Meanwhile, my deputy spent the night at Langley putting together relevant data from CIA and the other intelligence agencies to use in preparing Bush to brief the NSC. Putting together graphic photos, maps and so forth was relatively easy. Answering the obvious questions was not: had this been only the first step in what was to be a series of provocations? Had it been ordered from Pyongyang or was it some locally concerned adventure? Well before the NSC meeting we met Bush at his home to provide him with the intelligence briefing and let him know what had been going on on the policy side in the course of the night. At the door, as we were about to leave, Bush turned, gathered up the coffee cups, and washed them, saying "Barbara doesn't like me to leave dirty dishes around." I really liked that.

The NSC meeting was primarily concerned not with the whys and wherefores but with how to respond in ways that would convince the North Koreans to abandon any further moves they might have in mind while avoiding the possibility of escalation. I don't remember what part Bush played in this debate. I, of course, was one of the people who sat against the wall and spoke only when spoken to. Kissinger did ask me one question. I don't remember what it was, but it was clear to me that he was not satisfied with my answer. This was confirmed after the meeting when Phil growled at me, "You don't know how to answer Kissinger." But then he added, "You never have anything to do with him, how should you?"

I have since thought that if this had been a war game, the players would have regarded the point of departure as far-fetched. But, that said, everybody played very well. We went into high alert, put on an impressive display of naval and air might, and sent another team out to cut down the tree, this time with air support. But we used no force against North Korea. The Japanese did not object to our deploying from our bases on their soil. The Chinese, in effect, told Kim Il Sung, "You're on your own." And Kim expressed his regrets.

Q: Our ambassador, Dick Sneider, was on leave and our DCM was Tom Stern. There we were the country team trying to figure it out. My main contribution when they said they were going in to cut down the tree was to say, "Well for God's sake make sure the chainsaws work. Test them before you go."



COLBERT: They seem to have taken your advice. Earlier we had had another Korean problem, this one created by the South which, in 1974, had embarked on a secret nuclear weapons program. We were charged with analyzing Seoul's capabilities in this regard and the Agency's Scientific and Technology Directorate was assigned the principal responsibility. It became quite evident that, on a subject that had not previously concerned us, we were simply incapable of answering the question in any useful way. Fortunately, there was no need to rely on our uncertain answers. Diplomatic pressures on President Park Chung Hee and potential foreign suppliers brought the program to an end.

Q: I gather you became involved in Vietnam once again. When did this happen?

COLBERT: Early in 1975 I had had a detached retina operation which didn't keep me out of the office for very long but which left me for some time with significantly impaired vision. So I couldn't do the amount of reading and writing the job usually entailed. In order to make sure I kept busy and earned my salary, I was sent to meetings many the kind to which you send someone just to demonstrate your right to be present. But during this period also the North Vietnamese military offensive that was to result in the fall of Saigon was well under way. Almost daily meetings were being held to track developments and examine prospects. Given my background and, since I could hear and speak if not read, I was invited to participate.

As the end approached, USIB called for an Estimate on world reactions to the fall of Saigon which had indeed fallen by the time the Estimate got under way. I was put in charge of what was a rather unusual procedure. Community representatives for each world region met in separate panels under my chairmanship to produce regional drafts. Then, also under my chairmanship, representatives of each panel met to put the pieces together. There was little disagreement on the substance. The countries of East Asia those of Southeast Asia in particular would be apprehensive, not so much over the Communist victory which most of them had anticipated for some time, but over its impact on U.S. policy. Would the United States, as some politically prominent Americans were urging, leave Southeast Asia altogether, reduce its role in East Asia as a whole? Without over-stepping our intelligence role, we were able to comment that the U.S. had it within its powers to allay these fears. For the rest of the world, it was agreed the reaction would be relief. With the end of our war-generated problems and domestic divisions, the United States would now be able to pay adequate attention to what other countries saw as the really important problems.



These conclusions, however, proved unacceptable to most of the USIB members. Obviously, it was difficult for the military members to accept the conclusion that, in most of the world, the failure of an effort to which they had devoted so much was of so little consequence. Bill Hyland, whose INR analysts had earlier joined in the Community consensus, seemingly found it more important to defend Kissinger's credibility thesis than to maintain INR's well established tradition of independence from political pressures. Only Bill Colby and George Carver, who had as much emotional involvement in the war as any of their military colleagues, stood up for the integrity of the analysis. The Estimate accordingly was remanded to reps, a term of art, sometimes meaning go back and do better, but in this case, go away don't bother us.

Q: In a way, the Estimate as it emerged on paper is not the real point is it? The work that goes on the discussions, don't these mean that the conclusions become pretty well known among people dealing with the subject even if the Estimate is not published?

COLBERT: It seems to me that that would depend on the subject. But certainly, in this case, I wouldn't argue that the failure to publish the Estimate had consequences beyond the frustration felt by the people involved in its production. However, the USIB response to the fall of Saigon proved to be consequential for our work on Korea over the next years. Our experience with the deficiencies of the South Vietnamese army now raised a question not earlier considered. Were our over 30,000 troops in South Korea likely at some point to be facing the enemy with military partners no better than the South Vietnamese. I was tasked with two responsibilities: setting in motion more energetic collection efforts on Korea; and taking a preliminary look in Washington and Seoul at the South Korean army through reviewing the reporting and interviewing the knowledgeable. The results of the latter effort were reassuring. It seemed safe to conclude that the ROK army did not suffer from the weaknesses that had plagued its South Vietnamese counterpart. Meanwhile, it was becoming evident that we had been asking the wrong question; it was the capabilities of the North Korean military that we should be examining.



With your own Korean experience, you will probably remember the Nixon administration decision to withdraw one of the two divisions we then had in South Korea. The study preceding this decision had concluded that the military forces of North and South were in more or less equal balance. In subsequent examinations of the military balance, the North Korean total was arrived at by calculations of growth based on the 1970 figures. Since the South Korean armed forces were also growing, the assumption of a North/South military balance remained firmly embedded. Estimates on the North Korean threat, since they invariably cited the U.S. presence as a convincing deterrent, did not require detailed attention to North Korean capabilities. Nor had we been collecting intelligence that seemed to challenge the North/South balance assumption. In fact, the collection and analysis of intelligence on North Korea had not been accorded very high priority. Vietnam had absorbed both people and resources. In CIA, for example, work on the North Korean economy had been assigned to the office covering China, becoming a subject analysts dealt with when they had nothing more important to do. Political analysts tended to absorb themselves in a form of Kremlinology with inconsequential results.

Even before the USIB injunction to strengthen the intelligence effort had borne fruit in significant improvements, particularly better photographic coverage, new attention was being paid to intelligence already collected. Garmy intelligencdissatisfied with DIA's work on the North Korean military had assigned an analyst of their own, one John Armstrong, to spend every minute of his working time going over already accumulated material, photography, intercepts, and whatever else applied. Late in 1975 he had already found that North Korean tank forces were much larger than had been thought with one whole tank regiment near the DMZ that had never before been identified. At more or less the same time, CIA economists had done a study of North Korean iron and cement production on which they had pretty good data and which left unanswered an important question. Where was it all going? With the consumption figures far below the production ones, the obvious suspicion was that a good deal was being used for concealed military purposes, which indeed proved to be the case.

By the end of the Ford administration, military and CIA analysts had come to the conclusion that North Korean military policies, beginning in 1970 or thereabouts, had significantly altered the military balance in favor of the North. But we had not yet found very much interest in this conclusion in the policy community. Some of my best friends said, "You intelligence analysts always see the enemy as ten feet tall."

Q: Hadn't Jimmy Carter already announced is plan to remove U.S. ground troops from South Korea?



COLBERT: Yes, during his campaign for the Democratic nomination. And, over time, this did increase interest in our findings. Whatever other reasons Carter may have had, this must have looked to him like a politically popular move. The opposition to committing U.S. forces to wars in Asia generated by Vietnam was still potent while both on the Hill and among elements of the general public. President Park's human rights excesses and Koreagate revelations had brought South Korea into great disfavor.

Immediately after Carter's nomination, when he became entitled to CIA briefings, it seemed possible that his mind was not entirely closed. Asked by Bush to express his interests, Carter asked particularly to be told about things he didn't know about so that he could avoid making statements as a candidate he would regret as president. Thereafter the weekly list of possible briefing topics invariably included Korea and the military balance. And invariably it was ignored. We were, of course, deeply discouraged by our inability to call the attention of a potential new administration to our findings. Mort Abramowitz, then a deputy assistant secretary at DOD/ISA suggested a half-way step, a DIA/CIA memo to Brent Scowcroft at the NSC outlining the data and our conclusions. This would at least go into the files and perhaps come to the attention of the transition team at the NSC. Useful as the memo was in putting together our agreed summary of the existing intelligence and providing a basis for future elaboration, it had no other impact.

Late in January when a rather vaguely worded Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) 13 called for a review of Korea policy, including a reduction in U.S. conventional force levels, it seemed possible that the Korea PRM, like the one on the Philippine bases, could include some consideration of the pros and cons. When the working group convened, however, it was instructed that the PRM was to include no such consideration. Instead it was to be confined to examining ways in which the troop withdrawal might be carried out. This was devastating news to a group most of whom, like our embassy in Seoul and the military in the field, believed that the troop withdrawal policy was unwise. Now it appeared that the only way in which the PRM could have any sort of useful influence was by setting forth phases and procedures that might minimize the damage. And perhaps an NIE laying out the North Korean data and the military vulnerabilities of the South might have a helpful impact.

Q: I was in Korea at the time and we were absolutely horrified. It seemed to be to uncork the bottle and make the situation much more problematic, one where anything could happen. I remember talking to Lieutenant General Chaplain. I went up to visit him during one of their war games based on the assumption of U.S. withdrawal on the ground. He said just when Seoul is about to fall we'll have to call in massive air force strikes which we're not sure we'll be able to do in time. The feeling as I recall was that we could probably beat the North Koreans but not until horrific damage had been done and Seoul had been overrun.



COLBERT: In the Washington bureaucracy, supporters as I recall, were pretty much confined to the Bureau of the Budget and DOD's budget people who, in the period I'm talking about, were not convinced by the military balance arguments and saw some prospective savings.

Q: Well actually I thought that keeping the divisions in South Korea was a money saver because the Koreans were paying the upkeep and, if it were brought back to what I think was its headquarters in the State of Washington, there wasn't any room and it would cost money.

COLBERT: We raised that but they had the idea they could disband the division altogether. But, of course, for the Intelligence Community the main task was producing the NIE. This was made somewhat more difficult by what seemed to be constantly shifting deadlines. I don't remember the reason for these changes. But I do remember that the analysts responded cheerfully, worked terribly hard, and never really complained even when called on Sunday morning to come in Sunday afternoon. I should add that my relatively new deputy (his predecessor had left for an overseas assignment) was a source of tremendous strength. A Special Forces colonel, he more than compensated for my own lack of a military background.

With the arrival of Bush's successor as DCI, Admiral Stansfield Turner, a new complication entered into our efforts. When Carter attended a USIB meeting the first time to my knowledge that a president had done this purpose really seemed to be to make it clear that Turner was his man, reinforcing the DCI's already substantial ego. When, in response, the general then heading DINO shrinking violet himself asserted what he regarded as DIA's prerogatives, the President struck him down in no uncertain terms.

By the time Turner appeared on the scene, we had completed a first draft of the Estimate and promptly sent it up to him for comment. The draft came back to us with numerous objections scrawled in the margins all phrased in intemperate and insulting language far beyond anything I had ever experienced in my long years in government. The attacks continued in much the same vein, but never to the point of taking issue with the conclusions in ways that could be construed as an attempt to bring the Estimate into conformity with policy. Instead the assault was always on individual elements of the argument, for example, the degree to which North Korean MIG 17s would contribute to enemy fire power in the event of a surprise attack. Even so, by April, we thought we had a text which, while retaining the basic thrust, had met all of Turner's objections.

Q: What were your conclusions at this point?



COLBERT: The conclusion that in terms of military capabilities North Korea had a distinct advantage was already pretty clear cut. Beyond superior fire power the Estimate pointed to other significant assets: their capacity for surprise owing to the concentration of their troops close to the DMZ, their terrific communications security, and the location of their capital far up North whereas Seoul, the hub of South Korean economic and political life, was very close to the DMZ. Absent U.S. ground troops as trip wire or as part of the defense, North Korean forces might well reach Seoul before the U.S. could bring its air and naval forces fully to bear.

Q: Admiral Turner seemed to accept the basic thrust?

COLBERT: Yes, or we would not have been able to submit the text to USIB. But Turner then threw the USIB meeting into confusion, announcing that he was going to take a footnote to some paragraphs drafted by the Navy which, as I recall, he attacked as exaggerating North Korean capabilities at sea. Consternation ensued. How could the DCI, in whose name Estimates were issues, take a footnote? Faced with this anomaly, DIA and ONI succumbed, agreeing that Turner could substitute his text and they would take a footnote. The footnote having been provided, there seemed to be no further obstacle in the way of issuing the Estimate. But Turner had other ideas. He would not give the text the authority of an Estimate. It would merely be an intelligence annex to the PRM.

I suppose this could have been regarded as a distraction without a difference. Nevertheless, for me it was the last straw. For the DCI to disavow the dedicated efforts of a host of analysts and the views of his USIB colleagues was the final manifestation of a kind of behavior I felt I couldn't live with anymore. Unlike some of my equally horrified colleagues, I had a place to go. In principle, I had a right to return to the Department. I had been detailed to CIA for two years. I had served three. But I had to find a job for myself. Here luck was with me. I had some contact with EA's new assistant secretary Dick Holbrooke whom I had briefed on Vietnam when he was a staff assistant to the Undersecretary and we had attended a number of the same meetings after he resigned from the foreign service and became editor of Foreign Policy. I had much closer connections with his senior deputy Bill Gleysteen whose deputy I had been in INR and with whom I had been working on the PRM. So, in the event, on May 5, 1977, I entered on duty in EA.

Q: Did your return to State end your involvement in the military balance issue?



COLBERT: I remained involved but much less so. When I first arrived in EA, Dick was uneasy about letting me get anywhere near Korea, the word having got around a bit that I had left CIA because of my resistance to Turner's efforts to distort intelligence to support Carter's policy. This was a charge you couldn't pin on him; his demands for change were always directed toward individual aspects of the analysis. And in any case, as I have said, this is not why I left. Dick's uneasiness passed very quickly, however, and, with my friends at Langley keeping me informed of the results of the continuing intelligence effort, I was involved from time to time in EA's work on the subject. In the end, of course, the policy was suspended in February 1979 without any significant withdrawals having been made.

Q: Back to your arrival in EA in May 1977. What was your job?

COLBERT: First of all, it was outside the regular table of organization the kind of slot political appointees are entitled to fill in the early days of a new administration. So, a title had to be invented and this was Policy Planning Coordinator. Policy was certainly involved, planning in a fairly short-term sense, and coordination most of all; drafting and putting together contributions to departmental and inter-agency policy papers; reviewing policy papers involving East Asia drafted in the NSC and DOD; and drafting speeches a new enterprise for me and one that kept me a lot busier than I had anticipated.

Because I was supposed to be planning, I also became EA's liaison with the Planning Staff. Attending Planning Staff staff meetings produced little of EA interest since, under Tony Lake, the preoccupation was largely with Africa. More closely connected to my interests and EA's was the opportunity to attend the regular meetings between members of the Planning Staff and their Japanese counterparts and other Gaimusho officials. These were held alternately in Japan usually at some very attractive resort hotel and in Washington. Discussions at the meetings were always interesting and stimulating and I was able to take advantage of the trip to do other business in Tokyo.

Also outside EA, I had some responsibility for keeping an eye on the East-West Center in Honolulu, partially financed by USIA, which Holbrooke regarded as part of his parish. This involved little more than occasional discussions with USIA people and visits to the Center when I was stopping in Honolulu en route to Asia.

And, in the simplest terms, it often came down to doing whatever Holbrooke or one of the deputies wanted me to do at any given moment.



It must be evident that this was a job full of pitfalls and dangers. Almost anything I was called upon to do might be something a Country Director or some other officer might feel was treading on his toes. But I think I had certain assets that made the job less difficult than it might have been. First of all, I'd been around for a long time. I wasn't somebody brought in from outside thinking "now is my time to make the brains run on time." And also, because I'd been around for a long time, I knew most of the people and they knew me. Some of them had even worked for me in INR. Plus, I was getting close to retirement so I wasn't seen, I think, as a competitor, somebody out to get someone else's job or to get the job somebody wanted to get after he left the job he had. So I think it worked out pretty well in terms of sometimes getting into other people's business without getting them upset.

Q: How did you find working under Dick Holbrooke?

COLBERT: Terrific. I get along very well with Dick who could be difficult. Partly, I'd known him a long time. Partly, I think, again, because I was not competitive, I was, in his eyes, much older almost ancient, in a way a link with history. And it turned out that the kinds of things he wanted me to do, I was able to do. And I could get away with saying things to him other people couldn't. When Dick would shout at me, as he would at other people, I could say, "Dick, you shouldn't talk to me that way. Remember, I'm three years older than your mother!" and, as Dick had a strong sense of humor, it worked. He was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. I think I learned more about operating in the real world in the three years I was working with Dick than I had in my entire earlier career.

Q: Most people who have worked closely with him have tremendous respect for him. He might be a shouter and a yeller, but the dominant reflex is one of admiration. The man was very good. He was an operator, but it's healthy to work for an operator.

COLBERT: He also did things that were not in and of themselves of great importance but were valuable in terms of advancing EA's interests. For example, he would invite people from the Hill or otherwise politically prominent to EA staff meetings. They appreciated the attention and it gave EA greater entrée.

Q: I'm told he could carry on a policy discussion, be on the telephone, and watch television all at the same time.



COLBERT: Yes that's true, but it was not always useful. For some people, visitors especially, this meant that they weren't getting the attention they deserved. But, more significant in policy terms, Dick was both imaginative and creative with a strong sense of what was about to be important. And this was very much needed in what were still the early days of the Carter administration. The war in Vietnam was not far behind us, leaving Southeast Asians concerned about our future course and American seeing Southeast Asia as a disturbed and dangerous place. Under Nixon, the Guam doctrine and the opening to China had eaten away at the two philosophic pillars supporting an active role in Southeast Asia: the domino theory and the Chinese Communist threat. So while we were already on a new course in China and the major elements of our alliances with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand remained intact, future policy toward Southeast Asia remained in doubt. As yet the Carter administration had made clear only its desire to normalize relations with Hanoi while important Democrats were talking about abandoning the Philippine bases and ending our commitments to Thailand.

In this vacuum, certain of our policies elsewhere seemed positively threatening to our Asian audience: troop withdrawal from South Korea, approaches to the Soviet Union about mutual withdrawal of the Indian Ocean, preoccupation with human rights which seemed to overlook the PRC and the DRV while focusing on our friends. Nor were fears of American abandonment of Southeast Asia confined to Southeast Asians. They were felt also by our East Asian allies, Japan in particular.

When Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was invited to address the Asia Society an opportunity was provided to assuage these fears, to convey to Asians America's determination to remain a major actor in Asia and to demonstrate to Americans that East Asia was no longer an area of fearsome enemies and economic and political disorder but instead was politically stable, economically flourishing, and a valuable trading partner. Drafting this speech, to be delivered at the end of June was to be my first responsibility in my new job. But this meant merely that I was the one person at the bottom of an inverted pyramid required to be responsible to any number of people in EA, in Public Affairs, in the Planning Staff, in the Secretary's staff, others I no longer remember, and finally the Secretary himself, who, the night before the speech, did some rewriting of his own. Finding the balance between not inadvertently seeming to abandon policies we wished to preserve by failing to repeat old platitudes and seeming to enunciate new and dynamic policies was not easy. One comment I particularly remember came from Tony Lake. "What is the headline", he asked as a group of us were going over an early draft. "Vance goes to New York" he answered himself. It was not a fun job and I wound up with half a safe drawer full of drafts. But the speech, although in many ways little different from Ford administration post-Vietnam speeches proclaiming "the United States is and will remain a Pacific power", did emphasize Southeast Asia and especially ASEAN, with which we had not yet had any kind of relation.

Q: What was the problem? Was there some concern somewhere that ASEAN was a bad thing?



COLBERT: No, the absence of a relationship was largely ASEAN's doing although it also resulted from less American attention than might have been useful. When ASEAN began to establish relations outside the organization the so-called dialogue relationship it didn't wish to be seen as moving into the arms of the United States. This was still the time when the USSR and the PRC were attacking ASEAN as another SEATO while ASEAN characterized itself as independent and neutral. So establishing dialogue relationships was a very slow and cautious process, starting small with Australia and New Zealand, later moving on to Japan and the EC.

The new emphasis on ASEAN continued and was strengthened in Dick's speeches (a much more satisfying occupation for me since only he, I, and others in EA were involved). But beyond speeches, other developments were to make our relations with ASEAN much more substantial. Our first dialogue meeting was rather a let-down from the ASEAN point of view. While the ASEAN countries were represented by their foreign ministers, we were represented by the undersecretary. At the second meeting in Washington in 1978, however, the secretary attended as did a number of other Cabinet members and every effort was made to lend importance to the occasion. In the same year, the completion of the Philippine base negotiations confirmed our continuing interest and presence in Southeast Asia as did Vice President Mondale's confirmation, during his ASEAN trip, of the U.S. security commitment to Thailand, in doubt since the dissolution of SEATO during the previous administration.

Q: Were there any objections elsewhere in the Department to our getting closer to ASEAN?

COLBERT: There were some concerns in the economic bureau that we might go too far in responding to ASEAN's third-world type economic proposals. But otherwise, the East Asia Bureau had a relatively free hand in developing Southeast Asia policy. As is well known, China policy was a battleground in which State was ultimately defeated by the NSC. Japan policy, then concerned largely with trade issues, involved a host of other players, State's own economic bureaus as well as Commerce, the U.S. Trade Representative, and others.

Q: And on the other hand, the ASEAN states became much more comfortable with the United States?

COLBERT: Yes, and, although we were not able to satisfy ASEAN's third world type economic demands, our bilateral economic relationships became increasingly active and healthy. We also demonstrated our friendships in tangible ways. During the Vietnamese refugee crisis the flight of the boat people we relieved the ASEAN countries of heavy burdens through our leadership in and participation with others in refugee resettlement and financial support. And, in response to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, we were loyal supporters of ASEAN's leadership in the effort to bring about Vietnamese withdrawal.



Q: Was your principal preoccupation during this period 1977, 1978 with ASEAN or did you get involved in other issues?

COLBERT: Oh yes. I've talked so much about ASEAN, I suppose, because it continued to be one of my major interests after I retired from the Department. But I've already talked about my continued involvement in matters relating to the Korean military balance. And my miscellany of functions speech writing, reviewing, coordinating, filling gaps involved me also with most of the rest of East Asia.

I was once even admitted into the sacred precincts of China policy. Vance's first trip to China in August 1977 called forth the usual flock of briefing papers, including a number covering what were known as global issues. In the past, these were written by the China desk and not even cleared with other concerned desks. Now things were to change. Under my guidance, the other bureaus were to prepare their own briefings which I was then to review. To enable me to do my job, I was given access to one part of the China files which were usually closed to outsiders. This was very exciting. Or so I thought until I went through the files and discovered that all the things the Chinese were saying to us on these global subjects, they were also saying to all sorts of other visitors, officials and otherwise. More interesting were the comments Kissinger had scrawled on the margins of some of the telegrams. I was particularly gratified to see on one of them "X is a horse's ass" my opinion exactly.

Q: Did you run across the Human Rights Bureau and Pat Derian at all?

COLBERT: Pat was inescapable. EA was very much in her sights since three of our countries South Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia all important to the U.S. in one way or another, were undeniably serious human rights offenders. I think we came out pretty well in arguing that we needed to maintain a sensible balance among our various interests and that quiet diplomacy could be a useful tool.

Q: Can we move on now to April 1978 when you entered a new job as Deputy Assistant Secretary?



COLBERT: Not so much a new job but, as I'll explain, an additional one. But the first thing to be said is that my elevation had nothing to do either with the needs of the Bureau or my own sterling qualities. You may remember that at this time Vance had ordered each of the regional bureaus to appoint a woman to the front office. This may have been easier for EA than for some of the other bureaus. I was already part of the landscape and, even more important, no one had to be displaced to make room for me because it turned out that we had an empty DAS slot, one that had not been lost when the Vietnam Working Group was dissolved, merely put in storage.

From Dick's perspective, I could just go on doing what I had been doing under a new title. But others, and I became one of them, believed I should have a regional responsibility. Turning Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands over to me was easy enough since neither the Northeast Asia nor the Southeast Asia deputy had any possessive feelings about the South Pacific. For the resourceful Holbrooke, this became an opportunity to portray the appointment of a senior officer to this new position as the administration's recognition of the importance of the countries concerned. There was no question, however, that I would also continue to carry on many of my old responsibilities. In one sense indeed my availability was extended. When for some reason, deputy assistant secretary rank was needed to do some job and the appropriate officer was out of the country or otherwise unavailable, the job often became mine. Thus I found myself having to bone up on the evidence that the Lao government was using poison gas (Yellow Rain) against its opponents (evidence I did not find wholly persuasive) in order to testify before the House Foreign Relations Committee.

In continuing to carry on my old responsibilities while taking on new ones, I was singularly fortunate in my two country directors, Frank Bennett for Australia and New Zealand, Bill Bodde for the Pacific Islands. They were both very experienced foreign service officers, very intelligent, very self-starting and more than capable of compensating for any failure of attention on my part. The cordial relationship between Vance and the foreign ministers of Australia, Andrew Peacock, and New Zealand, Brian Talboys also helped while Peacock and Holbrooke were kindred souls.

Q: When you took over, what was the state of U.S. relations in your area?



COLBERT: Australia and New Zealand, of course, had long been our allies in the ANZUS pact. We had fought together. We were joined by common traditions and language. Although the relationship was not without problems, these were largely trade related. However, at the time I took over, the atmosphere between the Carter administration and the Australian government was not very good. Carter had somehow learned that when he first took office Prime Minister Fraser had referred to him dismissively as just a peanut farmer. Then, when Vice President Mondale visited Australia, he and Fraser had a very contentious debate over meat exports. Strong words were exchanged and all this was leaked to the press. However, an opportunity to improve the atmosphere arose when it became necessary to send a delegation to the funeral of former Prime Minister Robert Menzies who had also been something of an international figure. With Prince Charles representing the Queen and at least one former British prime minister in attendance it was important that the head of the American delegation be someone of distinction. Fortunately, Governor Harriman was willing to represent the United States. A private dinner with only the Frasers and the Harrimans went extremely well and the cloud over the relationship evaporated.

My life in the intelligence business had never required me to travel as an escort to some very important person, but I knew from my foreign service friends how difficult such an assignment could be. I was extremely fortunate that my first experience can only be described as a delightful one. Harriman was totally attentive to duty, read his briefing book carefully, and was interested enough to ask very good questions. He was equally attentive to his next assignment, a disarmament conference immediately following the funeral. For this, he had with him two fat briefing books full of obscure initials. He was completely understanding that I was well out of my field when I was unable to translate some of them.

Although I had had some contact with the Governor when he was EA's assistant secretary, I had never met Pamela Harriman. In her relations with those of us traveling with her, she was far from the bitchy type pictured in the gossip that emerged from her own social circle. She was totally helpful, cooperative, and charming. She was also, of course, very astute politically. In talking about Malcolm Fraser and his resemblance to General de Gaulle, she made very vivid the Downing Street atmosphere during World War II.

Q: I've gotten some extremely complementary comments about her from people I've interviewed who served with her when she was ambassador to France. They all describe her as a very effective representative.

COLBERT: I think she had what was perhaps a distinctively aristocratic British view of how you treat your staff, how you deal with the people who are working for you and with you as opposed to the way you relate to your social competitors.



Not long after the Harriman trip, Prime Minister Fraser's visit to Washington opened the way to another gesture catering to his sense of his own importance. We were in a meeting in the cabinet room and Fraser was being very gracious and complimentary indeed. Mondale, who was sitting next to Dick, passed him a note and he passed it to me. It read simply, "Do I know this man?" A point came when Fraser was clearly about to invite the President to visit Australia. Intercepting him, Carter asked, "How would you like me to send my most senior ambassador, Mike Mansfield, to talk with you and your people about the situation in Asia and the world?" Well, what could Fraser say yes, indeed. So in due course we went to Australia and New Zealand in November 1978 where Mansfield had very good conversations with Fraser and Prime Minister Muldoon of New Zealand and other officials in both countries. Like the Harrimans, although very different in personality, the Mansfields were great to travel with.

By the end of the Carter administration, relations with Australia were so good that Fraser offered us home porting in Perth for an American warship. For EA, this was an intriguing idea, a way of cementing the security aspects of the ANZUS relationship and as a possible fall back for the Philippines. But the Navy, concerned only with steaming time to the Near East, would have none of it.

Q: How about New Zealand? Didn't we have a nuclear problem there?

COLBERT: It was one that came upon us full force later on, but that we could already anticipate. Anti-nuclear sentiment was very strong among the New Zealand public and in the Labour Party which was widely expected to succeed the conservative Muldoon in office. Visits by nuclear powered or nuclear armed warships were the particular targets in our case and this meant any U.S. warships since our policy was "neither confirm nor deny." Accordingly, in my several visits to New Zealand during this period, I did a good deal of talking to Labour Party leaders, some of them with very strong anti-nuclear views, others less fixed in their own positions but very conscious of the views of their constituents. I was not very persuasive but my ego was fed by a headline in one of the leading New Zealand newspapers, "Colbert fails to change Labour Party policy." Only in New Zealand could Colbert make the headlines.

Q: And the Pacific Islands what kinds of problems arose there?



COLBERT: Probably the first problem was that this was an area about which I knew absolutely nothing. In Australia and New Zealand many of the people I was to deal with in my new job, I already knew from my years in the intelligence business. I had traveled in both countries and was reasonably well acquainted with their history, politics, and their relations with each other. On the Pacific Islands it was difficult even to educate myself. Before independence, as dependencies of France, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand subject to some degree of UN oversight, State Department responsibility such as it was had rested largely with the International Organization bureau. So there were few records of earlier dealings on which to draw. There was also little in the way of outside literature; most of what was then available having been the work of anthropologists. It wasn't until well after my retirement when I was asked to do a small book by the Asia Society, that I learned many things it would have been useful to know in 1978.

That said, however, it is also fair to say that the problems that arose in my day in our dealings with the Pacific Islands were largely of post-independence origin or had to do with negotiations with our own Trust Territory of which there was already a long and painful history. We were, of course, anxious to demonstrate a constructive interest in all these newly-independent islands, to show them that we were their friends. However, there were two obstacles in our path relating to fisheries the other to territorial claims. Neither of these problems was resolved during my tenure. Nor were we able to conclude our negotiations over the future status of the Trust Territory. On all three problems, I came in the middle and left in the middle.

The territorial problem arose from formal U.S. claims, dating from a much earlier period, to sovereignty over a number of small islands that were now within the boundaries of four newly-independent states. These claims were not easily renounced since to do so required congressional approval. Defense considerations also complicated the negotiations.

Q: Was this the strategic denial doctrine intended to keep the Soviets from establishing bases there?

COLBERT: Yes. And, since concern with this possibility was deeply rooted in Defense Department and congressional thinking, nothing was to be gained by arguing its unlikelihood. To satisfy these concerns, we needed to obtain from the island states commitments that foreign countries would not be permitted to bring warships into their territorial waters or harbors without U.S. consent. From the point of view of the countries concerned and their island neighbors this was an infringement on their sovereignty. From the point of view of New Zealand, which regarded itself as part of the island world, the United States was introducing the Cold War into an area where, hitherto, it had been absent. Once we succeeded in negotiating a treaty, congressional action did not follow quickly. The first of the four was not signed until 1991, a year after I retired.



The tuna issue was much more important and of much wider concern to the island countries. For most of them, tuna was their one commercially important resource and now, under the Law of the Sea Treaty, they had their first chances to profit from it. Under the treaty in their economic zone (200 miles from shore) they could now regulate the fishermonopolized by distant water fisherlicensing, setting fees, quotas and other conditions. This, however, was unacceptable to the United States because under American legislation we could not recognize coastal state sovereignty over highly migratory species and tuna was nothing if not highly migratory. Not only were we precluded from recognizing the right of coastal states to regulate the tuna fishery, but also, if any American vessel were confiscated or fined for violating coastal state regulations, the U.S. government was required both to compensate the owner and boycott fish exports from the offending state. However, the legislation also seemed to offer a solution. It also provided that we could recognize the regulatory rights of the island states if they and we were part of a regional organization that issued licenses and otherwise regulated the catch. Indeed such an organization was already in being for the eastern Pacific tuna fishery. Now we sought to persuade the Pacific island countries, already organized in the Pacific Forum, to engage in a regional fishing organization of which the United States would be a member. But we were not successful. The island states resented our policy as an affront to their sovereignty and regarded American tuna fishers as little better than pirates. They were concerned that we would dominate to our own interest any organization of which the United States was a member. And finally not all of the island countries really wanted a regulatory agency that would assign quotas; some countries, like Papua New Guinea, were very rich in tuna, well aware that in the waters of some of the Polynesian countries there were no tuna at all, and not enthusiastic about sharing with less endowed neighbors. So, when the Forum Fisheries Agency was organized in 1978, the outcome from Washington's point of view, was totally non-productive. Membership was confined to the Pacific Forum itself of which only Australia and New Zealand were non-island members. It had no regulatory functions being limited to research-type activities. U.S. efforts to alter the situation were not successful until 1988, long after I had disappeared from the scene.

The other major problem in which I was involved had to do with the future status of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) former Japanese colonies placed under U.S. administration at the end of World War II. When I came on the scene, negotiations, under way since the Nixon administration, had made it evident that, if the various island groups making up the territory were united in anything, it was in the desire that future relations with the United States should involve semi-sovereignty but continued economic support. The principal issues at the time revolved around the extent of such support, the degree to which its utilization would be subject to federal government review, and the extent and modalities of U.S. military use of Micronesian territory.



The negotiating process, agonizingly slow and cumbersome, had beaten any number of people into the ground by the time I came along. We were no longer negotiating with a single Micronesian team but with three separate ones representing three regions, each with somewhat different interests and each represented by highly-paid American lawyers from big U.S. law firms. On the U.S. side, the actors were even more numerous. In State, the overall responsibility was vested in the Counselor, then Rozanne Ridgway, negotiating responsibility in EA, but IO was also involved because any agreements would have to be approved by the Security Council and, in the expectation of a Soviet veto, this was going to be difficult. And, while the Counselor was our leader, she wasn't anybody else's leader. There was the equally involved and very possessive Department of the Interior, the administering authority. And, of course, the Defense Department, not to mention other cabinet departments with programs of one kind or another in the islands. Hoping to provide leadership and cohesion, the Carter administration had established the Office of Micronesian States Negotiations headed by a special representative of the President with ambassadorial rank. I may have contributed something useful to the process but, if I did, I certainly don't remember what it was.

Despite these frustrations, my Pacific Islands assignment had its rewards, not the least of them a visit to Fiji and Papua New Guinea as escort to Andrew Young, then our ambassador to the United Nations. It began as simply a trip to Australia, the Australia-America Association having put Young at the top of its list of desired speakers for Australian America week, formerly a one-day commemoration of the battle of the Coral Sea but now a weeklong celebration with events in a number of cities.



Initially Andy was reluctant to accept the invitation. On crutches after a leg operation, he was not enthusiastic about a long trip to Australia to be followed by air travel from one end of the continent to the other. I was pretty unenthusiastic myself. In New York, Andy's spontaneous and not always diplomatic responses to press interrogations had been widely reported. I knew Australian journalists to be aggressive and adept at laying traps for the unwary and, of course, I would be responsible for any mishaps. Fortunately, Andy abandoned his reservations when it was decided to put an air force plane at his disposal. This, however, introduced new complications. To send Andy Young alone in a whole plane only to Australia seemed wasteful of manpower and equipment. EA added Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The bureau responsible for U.S. representation at the Manila meeting of the United Nations Commission for Trade and Economic Development (UNCTAD) made Andy the nominal leader of the U.S. delegation. This aroused Pat Derian who objected that Andy's presence would seem to lend U.S. sanction to the egregious human rights abuse of the Marcos regime. She was mollified, however, by arrangements for Andy to meet in Manila with representatives of the Philippine opposition. By the time we took off we had a plane load: Andy, his wife, his New Yorkentouragthree or four people who had been with him through the civil rights struggle and two security officers; a number of people from various parts of the Department and AID with an interest in one or another aspect of the trip; and some five deserving Democrats whose turn it was to represent the United States on some pleasant occasion in a nice place. However, it proved to be a congenial group with no prima donnas.

My misgivings about the Australian leg of the trip were quickly dispelled. Australian journalists were so completely preoccupied with the slowly-emerging results of a hotly contested election in Victoria that they had no time for provocative questions. My fears of disasters arising from Andy's refusal to read his briefing books were also dispelled. His Australian audiences were more interested in his views on the decolonization of Rhodesia process in which Prime Minister Fraser had also been involved than on anything covered by his briefs. Since the UN had also been important in the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, Andy was on home ground. Ironically, all I can remember of what he said was his endorsement of Mugabe and his colleagues as well-educated, intelligent, fully equipped to run a modern, progressive state. But the unhappy outcome was far in the future. Meanwhile, Andy was enthusiastically received at every event at which he appeared, all of them over-booked, one of the expectations, I was told, that had led this quite conservative organization to seek him as their speaker.

His encounter with representatives of the Australian aborigines was quite different. There he was audience rather than speaker in a dimly-lit, soon smoke-filled hall in Perth. A succession of tribal leaders stood up to speak, each repeating more or less what the others had said. Andy's people in particular were completely dismissive: these people are totally tribal; they have no notion of organization; they will never amount to anything.



Another aborigine encounter took place on our return to Canberra. There one of the few aborigines who had risen to a role in national politics asked for an appointment. This was arranged for early in the afternoon and, when he asked for a postponement until later in the day, this too was arranged but he was warned that Andy might be a little late as, on doctor's orders, he would have to fit in a swim after his previous appointment. This man, whose name I have forgotten, had recently published a biography titled *I am a Son of a Bitch*. And so he was. When he arrived in a room in the residence known as the library, he made it very evident that he was annoyed that Andy was not yet there and that only his public affairs officer, a tall and imposing woman, and I were there to greet him. Having complained about Andy's absence, he remarked sarcastically on the not very well-filled bookcases and then, in a more ingratiating tone, said to Andy's PAO, "I know your people, I've been to Harlem." Drawing herself to her full height (he was a very little man) she replied coldly, "I was born and brought up in Chicago." If he had anything significant to say to Andy, it has escaped my memory.

Q: You went on from Australia to Fiji and Papua New Guinea?

COLBERT: Yes, and Andy was greeted even more enthusiastically there than in Australia. Even before he arrived, he had a lot going for him. He was a black like them who had won great prestige and high public office in a very powerful country and he was, in addition, an ordained minister. This fact, which had passed unnoticed in Australia, was of great importance in the islands which had been very successfully Christianized by nineteenth century missionaries and where clergy were important in politics and other fields outside the church. The importance of religious observance, in fact, brought about a change in plans for a welcoming ceremony in Fiji. Originally arriving on Saturday, we were to be greeted at a village outside Suva with a traditional ceremony featuring native dress, kava, and customary ritual. But when our arrival was changed to Sunday, a church service was substituted and the traditional ceremony postponed until Monday. So, in the biggest Protestant church in Suva, Andy preached the sermon, his theme "we are all children of God." With the hymns booming out of those huge Fijian chests, it was a truly tremendous experience. And the reception was the same wherever he spoke especially in the universities, one in Suva and one in Port Moresby, where the audience was literally hanging from the rafters. It was all quite astonishing. Meetings with the prime minister of both countries and other high officials were of less note. Andy had been extensively briefed on the fisheries problem in hopes that he would press our case but it was not something he had any enthusiasm for.

Q: How did things go in Manila?



COLBERT: I would say, very curiously, very curiously indeed. Protocol events aside, Andy had only two missions in Manila. One was as titular head of the U.S. UNCTAD delegation. This required him only to deliver the U.S. opening statement. The other was to meet with opposition activists, they having decided for reasons of their own that there should be two meetings, one with a lay group, the other with clerics.

The meeting with the oppositionists was something of a surprise to me. There was a really evident absence of sympathy on both sides. On the Filipino side, I seemed to see a trace of resentment at having to deal with someone they seemed to see as of lower social status, ambassador or not, certainly no apparent sense that they were fellow freedom fighters. And, on the side of Andy and his people, almost contempt what's the matter with these people? They keep complaining about what the United States should do. Don't they realize they've got to do it themselves?

Of Andy's other calls, the only one I remember was a one on one with President Marcos. Here were these two very important men sitting in very important chairs in a huge room otherwise inhabited only by more important chairs and me. There they sat exchanging highly elevated thoughts on very big subjects but, for the note taker, nothing that needed to be preserved. And, all the while, Imelda kept marching through with small groups of people in tow for all the world like a tour guide.

Then she had her own turn, with very little notice inviting us all to lunch at the Blue House. Andy's own delegation and the rather large UNCTAD group in which African Americans were also well represented. We sat at any number of small tables being served innumerable courses and entertained by singers and dancers after each. One dance, billed as a southern Philippine tradition was performed in blackface. In another performance, a bevy of young Filipinas in their beautiful traditional dress arrived swaying and singing. And what were they singing? Dixie! Every verse known to man. I could see Ambassador Murphy at the head table stiffening with embarrassment. Our black colleagues, however, took it all in stride. What they loved about the event was that it ended up with disco dancing; all through the trip we had been searching in vain for a place to go disco dancing.



The irony of it all was that Andy unimpressed by the opposition came away very impressed with Marcos. In his goings back and forth, he had frequently passed through the Manila business district which was full of big, modern high rise buildingbanks, hotels, and the headquarters of various enterprises. He found this reminiscent of Atlanta where he attributed the success of integration to the great rise in employment that came about because he, as mayor, had been able to attract big business, banks, and hotels to the city. Sometime after the trip he had drafted a telegram to Manila arguing for the need to understand the good features of the Marcos administration, all it was doing in the way of economic development. He had come by one day to show the draft to Holbrooke. But Dick as usual was on two telephones so, to pass the time, Andy had wandered into my office and asked my opinion. Well, I said, this might be okay with Dick but you better show it to Pat. What happened after that, I have no idea.

Q: This was after the trip? Was Manila the last stop?

COLBERT: For Andy yes. He had planned to go on to Tokyo which he had enjoyed visiting earlier. But by Manila he was very tired and had decided to go home. But I went on to Tokyo where I had appointments in the Gaimusho with officials concerned with Japanese-South Pacific relations and others. From Tokyo I went on to Seoul to touch base with Bill Gleysteenow our ambassadoand the embassy. At this time, May 1979, some of the strain in U.S.-ROK relations had been eased by the suspension of troop withdrawals in February and the announcement in April of plans for a Carter-Park summit in the summer. In October, however, South Korea was thrown into turmoil when President Park was assassinated by the head of his intelligence agency and his security chief. Were you still there then?

Q: No, I had already left.

COLBERT: Well, you may have been interested enough to follow events there and to remember the turmoil that followed and the difficult problems we faced in a time of rapidly moving and often confusing developments that ultimately eventuated in the absolutist government of General Chun Doo Hwan. I needn't detail these developments or our responses here. They are amply covered in Bill Gleysteen's published account. Suffice it for me to say here that these events alternated between extreme repression and total abandonment of constitutional institutions on the one hand, and, less frequently, signs that a transition to civilian, constitutional government might be possible. And that there were grave difficulties in the way of determining appropriate and effective responses not the least of which was that our strongest lever, the security relationship, was clearly out of bounds.



Here I would just like to touch on the policy-making process itself because it was both unique and effective. Early in his term as assistant secretary, Holbrooke had invented a device called the EA Informal. This brought together, usually once a week, Dick, his deputies and representatives at the assistant secretary or deputy assistant secretary level of DOD, CIA and the NSC. It had been utilized to good effect on a number of occasions but it was in connection with the Korean crisis, when it included the Korea country director, that it really proved its worth. Cutting through the bureaucratic maze, it brought into continuous contact the senior action officers of the agencies concerned in continuous review of developments on the ground and embassy comments and recommendations and in debates over the alternatives. These could be heated but, for all involved, the object was to arrive at recommendations that could be passed up to superiors as having been agreed upon by their representatives. This very collegial approach was very fortunately mirrored in Seoul where the ambassador, the station chief, and the commander of U.S. forces enjoyed a cooperative relationship that had not always prevailed in the past. My own role in a process, not really completed until the Reagan administration, ended with my retirement shortly after a brief trip to Seoul in June, together with the Korea Country Director, just to go over the ground with Bill and his staff to make sure that no gaps existed between the views of Washington and Seoul.

Q: So it was at the end of June 1980 that you retired?

COLBERT: From the Department, yes. But not from an active professional interest in East Asia maintained for the next twenty years through teaching at the FSI and SAIS, lecturing elsewhere, writing, working at the Carnegie Endowment, and participating in a variety of other professional activities.

End of interview